

Writing

Thomas' writing can be found in various pages at [Archive.org](https://archive.org), particularly in the Community Texts collection.

In 1993, Thomas received a B.A. in literature from Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois). His scholastic essays were generally very successful. One assigned essay resulted in a charge of plagiarism, but it turned out that the piece was indeed original, and the charge was dropped.

Thomas' independent writings are quite diverse and span many modes of the modern word, including essays, poetry, fiction and blog entries, among other forms.

The pieces represented here include Thomas' collection of various types of writing, "Disjointed", his novella, "The Hunt For Scott Turner", and a log of his recent publishing achievements.

Disjointed

Introduction

My history with the written word is not that unusual. As a student, I began by consuming it. Before long, I learned to process and regurgitate it. I was good at that-- an "A" student, who was known for his essays. My English teacher presented me with a writing award, calling me, "Pithy".

I read quite a bit in high school and college. The material I liked best I was not mainly prepared to understand.

For many years I quit reading-- other than magazines, newspapers or various online sites or publications. This was the case even though I worked at a library.

Life's hardships and a lack of patience for bullshit taught me that, in this modern world, a person has to be their own writer.

You can start by reading. You can keep reading, please do.

But don't forget to tell me your side of things. Please tell it your way-- if you don't, no one else will. Or they won't get it right.

Nowadays, you have to be your own poet, your own writer, your own artist.

"Disjointed" is a series of writings I have created over the past couple of years. There are essays, poems and a series of blog entries. All of the material is original. Some occurs in various places online, but this is the only collection of all of the writings in one document.

I would like to thank George De Bruin for believing in me, and for his great work with creative commons and other types of shared media. Thanks to my family, for allowing me, as a young man, to learn. Thanks to my wife for giving me the space to create, and for restoring my sanity afterwards.

And thanks to you for sharing your time.

Essays

Here are four original essays. The first three have been lightly edited by artist Randee Silv. Ms. Silv was also kind enough to publish them on her art and culture site, "Arteidolia". "A Poetry Of Lossy Media" and "The High Fidelity Home" were published, additionally, in the online magazine, "Entropy". "A Poetry Of Lossy Media" also appears in "The Blue Nib."

The essays concern music. They contain a series of thoughts I was developing about what music can or should be. They are opinions, yes-- but also absolutely correct. There is no doubt about that.

New Industrial Music

"Those of us who live in an urban environment are subjected to a multitude of noises coming from machines and, sometimes, from loud human beings. I imagine there will be some study on this, but intuitively, I think there is an even greater quantity of sustained noise with relatively fewer dB's than big noises like explosions, ambulances or screaming babies. The latter simply draw more attention. It is not until the air conditioning is turned off or the street is closed down for a market that we realize that there was something more on top of the silence, or what, innocently, we believed silence." -Miguel Parera Jacques

A genre of music called "Industrial" has been around for decades. It began with the band Throbbing Gristle, in the 1970's, and at the time was characterized by strange or unusual themes. This preponderance for the weird or spectacular reached a peak in the 1990's in Chicago, where bands like Ministry and Skinny Puppy used drum machines, heavily distorted guitars, and sampling keyboards to create particularly aggressive sounds and vibes. Early Industrial music drew its name from the "Industrial Revolution", and was associated with a world changed by big business, industry and urban living.

The main reason a "New Industrial" music is relevant is that the urban environments it connotes are growing. More and more people live in cities each year. The entire West Coast of the United States is close to becoming one megacity. Although some cities are not as prominent as they once were, generally cities are becoming places of choice for people to inhabit, and that is a trend that is worldwide.

I am in favor of creating a mythic aspect to the city-- living in cities has become so common amongst people that places like the DMV, the Industrial District, the Bus Stop, Train Station and other locales are now parts of mass consciousness. These and other locations have their own sights, sounds and smells. As a musician I am interested in exploring the sonic palette of such places-- of capturing or rendering their aural signature. How many millions of people have waited for a bus? Or boarded a subway?

Modern cities are often trapped in outdated, decaying infrastructures. How much more evocative is the train track or train yard when only a few, rusted, archaic cars lumber along those lines

each day? Maybe this is the sad magic that "Urb Ex" photographers pursue when they risk life and limb to enter old buildings that have remained unused or misused for decades. What does the reality of global warming mean about the existence of large smokestacks, whether they billow chemical smoke, or not? Has some of the city become mythic in that it persists as ancestral memory, from the days of our parents and grandparents?

I would suggest that, in our current culture, the authentic music of the city is rap music. Rap is the only genre that captures the energy and danger of urban environments. The problem with rap is mainly that it relies too much on the human voice, and the city is more vast, more depersonalized, and less individual than a voice can evoke with any success. Rap also suggests a link with African (and hence African American) culture, and though a "New Industrial" music must encompass this kind of experience, it should not be limited to it, but should conjoin experiences of people with all backgrounds and histories who have come to cities to settle. A "New Industrial" should be more like a "Statue of Liberty" of music, welcoming all to come gather.

Being places for masses of people to work and survive, cities involve a depersonalizing quality. That is necessary, as the resources of the urban environment function for a broad spectrum of people with different needs. The bus works for us all (or as many as is possible), the courthouse must allow us to pass through and have our say and experience, and since we are all involved, not one of us particularly is, but us as a community. Hence the depersonalization. A new industrial music should capture this effect as well, being similarly accessible to many people, and similarly abstract or non-emotive.

Further evoking a depersonalized quality is the lack of greenery in a city-- where many square miles of concrete and asphalt edge out grass, shrubs and trees, people feel cut off from their nature and hence from their roots. It is the job of "New Industrial" to make this experience aurally tangible.

If there is an emotional spectrum for the structure of cities it would be awe, and perhaps fear. We feel awe over the size and scope of its structures, over their ability to be rendered inaccessible, and the sense that they represent institutions that are beyond our control. We experience fear that a person might become lost or need help and be unable to find it, being shut out by the millions who do not know them or by the buildings that house necessary resources. Third Reich architects consciously made structures radically large, to dwarf and intimidate individuals. This effect is attained for convenience rather than intimidation in most modern cities, where huge skyscrapers are locked and secured and made places where the general public is not welcome.

It is possible that a certain "New Industrial" music could be used to counteract the more automated, mechanical or unnerving aspects of city life. This type of music could serve as a remedy for the parts of life (and other musics) which overstimulate. By using elements of our urban environments, but portraying them in certain ways—for example, with longer phrases or sustained tones or sounds, a composer promotes a sense of time that reaches beyond the current mode of "Jetzeit". This type of "drone" music, can easily be part of a "New Industrial" genre. In the words of Gerald Fiebig, "In recent decades, new forms of 'drone music' have emerged across a variety of electronic and even rock-based musical idioms, from 'drone ambient' to 'drone metal'. What they share is an interest in very slow musical developments, sometimes bordering on stasis. Listening to such sounds is very different from much of our musical experience, where variety and tempo are what we usually listen out for. But drone sounds not only challenge our listening habits, they also go towards deprogramming our everyday modes of behaviour, which are usually geared towards speedily, efficiently working through our everyday chores both at work and in our private lives. In fact, sociologists such as Hartmut Rosa have

argued that the continuous acceleration of modern life since the beginning of industrialisation is now reaching, or has already reached, a point where human beings tend not to be able to cope with it anymore. Drones offer a possible antidote to this development. They invite us to listen closely to very slow developments, offering us time out from the constant rhythm of 'speed and efficiency,' giving us a sonic canvas on which to develop our own creative ideas."

Moving on to other specific musical elements, texture can be a quality in music as well as materials. Cities are full of textures-- largely due to the man-made substances that comprise the buildings, streets and other structures. There is metal-- both in its new, polished, "clean" aspect, and in its old, rusty aspect. Concrete, freshly poured and cracked by time and elements. Asphalt, black and smooth and faded and warped. The juxtaposition of old and new in the city makes this so. How do these visual textures translate into music? What does rust sound like? Or cracked concrete or pavement? Can you hear the edge of a slab of concrete? Moreover, the city has a presence-- a continuing existence in consciousness. Can we use sound to evoke this presence-- the reality of the proximity of an urban environment, with its man-made, profane, polluted traits?

Many musicians have used traditional instruments to connote the city. I suggest that simply recorded phonographic sounds, using devices of varying sophistication, could be relevant. Recordings can be listened to directly, sampled and composed, or sampled, treated, and assembled after these processes have been applied. Effects such as granulation, distortion and reverberation can accentuate certain aspects of urban recordings. Effects can especially bring out texture and scale. Recordings could be made in both micro and macro environments-- capturing larger-scale scenes, and smaller scenes such as equipment devices and atmospheres of individual apartments or other enclosed areas.

Noise as an aspect of music has been explored. There are some (such as Luigi Russolo), who suggested that noise should be the main element in a new kind of music. Others, such as certain rock bands in the '90s, used noise together with melodic elements to create a "wall of sound" effect. Noise is part of the urban environment. I would suggest that cities are elements where noise has become yet another color on the sonic palette. There is more to urban sound than noise, but it would not be complete without it. A "New Industrial" music should reflect this.

I think it is time to ask why we called Industrial Music "Industrial", and to think about re-rendering in music the environments which this word connotes. I hope that musicians and listeners will consider the ideas represented here, as well as the techniques, and explore a new movement in music, using the "Industrial" moniker, but replacing guitars and drum machines with recordings, actual and processed, of real urban environments. A music less focused on overstimulation and spectacle than the original "Industrial" music—which allows room to muse and meditate, both on our surroundings and on our lives, in general.

A Machine Music Manifesto

Earlier in 2017 I brought up some ideas for a "New Industrial Music". A main component of this music involved using field recordings made of urban locations as sources. Rather than guitars and drum machines, actual recordings of the city were to be the source of sound. This idea has been further developed into a notion of 'Machine Music'. Recordings of machines can be used as source material for

this kind of composition, and the use of machines found in an urban setting makes Machine Music both its own variety and an extension of the New Industrial category.

I have made this observation, and my wife recently mentioned this of her own accord, that music on the radio follows certain formulae. She noticed that there were similarities between songs that went deeper than style, and got into using singers whose voices closely resembled one another, or the same technologies and instruments creating the same sounds (such as a use of “autotune”, which forces sounds, and especially vocals, to comply to a specific pitch). In a certain way, the mainstream music business is itself mechanical—methods and designs are used quite abstractly to generate products, much in the same way that factory machines do. Why not, then, simply express what is essential and make a music of machines?

Many forms of music already use or involve machines. Instruments are or resemble machines, as do devices used to record, including microphones and mixing decks, computers, and so forth. We master our sounds using software, on a computer. Files are burned to disc, or distributed online, passed from one machine to another and eventually to a mobile device or stereo.

Machine sounds themselves can be found in some music, especially in industrial music. A band might mix in a recording of factory equipment, or use power drills or similar devices as sonic sources, whether live on in the studio (such as the band Einstürzende Neubauten). The machines create a supplemental voice in the mix, or are used as one or a few elements. I would propose that machines should become the dominant, or perhaps the only, sound source in a new type of music. How often do we need to hear a guitar, flute, or bongo? Why not explore and convey a new set of sounds made by mechanical devices?

Machines can make interesting and often rich sounds. A normal microphone can pick them up, but even better is a contact microphone. A contact mic is a small disc that is attached to a surface. It picks up the vibrations running through the surface, passing along the sounds manifested in its target. Contact mics are great for recording the various sounds that machines make as they turn on or off and run through their many cycles.

An excellent example of a machine as audio source is a washing machine. A washing machine produces literally dozens of sounds, as it moves from cycle to cycle. Each part of the washing process has its own sound, from the percolation of water filling the tank to various gear-grinding noises as the clothes are spun about. These sounds can be captured and further processed using audio software—excellent methods are to try various forms of granulation, or to add distortion or reverberation effects.

Composing using machine sounds can be as simple or as complex as needed. Many machine sounds are variations of noise (or noisy drones), and therefore they do not need to be tuned, and can be mixed together and layered freely. Occasional machine sounds have a pitch, which can be used as a source of tonality, or adjusted to match any other pitches using basic audio software.

What is the effect of such compositions? This may vary, but generally by using machine sounds, though some amount of noise exists within the pieces, it is quite easy to create a regular, repetitive, precise and meticulous kind of music. I would generally call these kinds of pieces “soundscapes”, as they are ambient drone collages of sound. The sounds in the pieces seem to come from the same sonic family, and indeed they do, having been recorded from similar sources. This effect is heightened if the same recording method is used throughout (for example, the same contact microphone, recording at

the same fidelity). It is the case that machines provide their very own new category of instrumentation, and can be harnessed to craft music with a very distinct aesthetic.

I hope that readers will consider furthering the New Industrial idea and developing a music of machines. It is a more honest approach to music, I feel, than regarding contemporary mainstream music as being anything other than mechanical itself. If a music is essentially of a machine, why not make it to sound that way? Machine Music provides a direct and authentic aesthetic of pragmatic, exact, and repetitive sounds, without using classical instruments or the human voice. Machine Music paves a clear path ahead in the world of music, and it is a good time to establish and explore this path.

A Poetry Of Lossy Media

It is interesting that we try to create and preserve media that is, technically, “perfect”, or lossless, and does not fade with time. Perhaps a more honest approach would be to record on lossy media, and note and reflect upon the influence the passing years have—if art is truly a mirror, it cannot truly be permanent.

People, animals, plants, they all age and pass away. Materials, even the sturdiest, do, as well. Astrophysicists can suggest an approximate time when the Earth itself will disappear into the Sun as it swells into a Red Giant star.

Theoretically, by using digital methods, we can create ideal and permanent records of media. A file I create today could be accessed 1000 years in the future, and if compatibility was in place, it would sound the same.

This is certainly a compelling and exciting capability. To the archivist, it presents the possibility to freeze media in time, so that any further decay is arrested. If all media were archived in 2017, then they would continue indefinitely as they existed in that year, at that time.

That’s all technically very interesting, but it does lack a sense of poetry. What is permanent? Ideas, perhaps, could be, or virtually so. Most things of this world are not permanent. Even durable materials such as stone and metal crumble and rust over periods of time.

Analog cassettes are a more organic way of storing audio—in a sense, a more humane way. Immediately the effects of the passage of time on the music is apparent while listening to tapes.

While surveying some cassettes originally recorded over 20 years ago, I noticed a variety of time- and device- based sounds—there was what we call “tape hiss”- a sustained, upper-range layer of white noise. To my ears, this seemed louder now than when these tapes were recorded—though it may be the case that I am simply more used to high-fidelity digital recordings that have no lossy sounds of this nature, and so I was more aware of the earlier sounds. There were periodic sounds that were something between metallic and noise sounds. I was not sure what those were—they seemed to have to do with the decay of the tape. There were also thrumming bassy sounds emitted by the cassette player. I was amused to discover that these bassy sounds could be detected on any of a variety of cassette decks, of different ages and conditions.

William Basinski, with his famous “Disintegration Loops”, captured instrumental phrases on reel-to-reel tape in the very process of erosion. Listening to these recordings is both musical, emotional and philosophical, as the process of time is made manifest before our ears.

In the 1990’s, there emerged a sampling movement in popular music, in which phrases from older recordings were used as bases for newer songs. Many newer songs therefore contain elements of tape decay (or more frequently, vinyl scratches). Sampling in this manner has continued through our current day. This practice connects newer songs with the older ones, and raises issues both of the passage of time and timelessness.

For the musician, and perhaps archivist—there emerges a challenge. That is to capture, as Basinski did, media in a unique state of decay—to digitize the media at one moment, and therefore to preserve both its original condition, to some degree, and its “present” one. This brings up all kinds of possibilities—one analog cassette, for example, or vinyl record, could be recorded at different times. One recording might represent a certain symphony as retrieved from a particular segment of tape, say, in March of 1995, where a different recording could be made and cataloged at a later time—maybe March of 2005. The archivist (and others) could experience and assess the differences between the two recordings, and note the effects of time on the media.

Media freezes its source(s). Then, media, adding a layer of complexity, either remains “frozen”, or in the case of lossy media, begins a process of decay, altering the recording. The musician “Rapoon”, with his “Time Frost” cd (2007 Glacial Movements), used a recording of the “Blue Danube” as source material. The recording was ripped from lossy media, showing signs of aural decay. These signs were accompanied by glitches, patches of static and other noises, added by Rapoon in the finished songs. In the notes for the release, he envisioned a future person finding the recording lodged in a glacier, after a newer ice age. The image of a cd stuck in a layer of ice is evocative, referencing both the freezing cold of the glacier and the frozen state of the audio as created for the cd.

This year, I began a process of freezing several old cassettes in time and created “rips” of over a dozen cassettes. By capturing and preserving a tape mix, conversations with its author led to the sonic and nostalgic qualities of the tape, and its condition in 2017. The passage of time had altered the music, making it much more complex sonically. These recordings are, for the most part, available to me as lossless files, with no decay, as I have saved the files from when they were created. Yet, I return to the ripped versions and listen to them instead, with their warm, organic qualities, and attributes added by time, dust, heat and other factors.

The High Fidelity Home

Music, and especially ambient music, has often an aim to transport a listener to places they have never been, or want to visit. Some ambient albums sound African, some Caribbean-- other musics attempt to transport a person to India, or even to ancient or prehistoric settings.

Another approach might be to restore listeners to their own environment(s). Music could supply a new filter for listening to the familiar.

Everyday items, appliances and environments might be recorded, and possibly processed, or even composed, to create atmospheric musics which recreate a person's homelife. The journey would no longer be to some distant place or time. The journey would be towards a new view of one's own surroundings.

One of my early exposures to drone music was Alp's "At Home With Alp" (1999 Soleilmoon). In this album, the artist processed and sequenced recordings made in his home, transforming them into gentle, ambient soundscapes.

A much-documented period in my career as mystified occurred when I began using phonographic material, both in and of itself, and as sources for other compositions. This material, gathered mainly in my South Saint Louis apartment, led to the creation of popular netreleases such as, "Nocturne" (2006 Treetrunk) and "South City Spring" (2006 Treetrunk).

What were the effects of such methods? I should mention highs and lows. Music like this can create new sounds and sonic environments, but they do not tend towards the grand or lofty, as much as ambient music often does. They can be aurally engaging, while remaining local, familiar-- even low.

Perhaps they are the musical equivalents of Duchamp's "Readymades", or of Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures.

Modes like these are additionally helpful for musicians, as they are able to easily and conveniently harvest sounds from home, or from nearby, using any of a variety of inexpensive recording devices. They provide accessible sounds for which a studio is not necessary, nor are musical instruments, amplification devices, synthesizers, or similar gear.

My main contribution to "The High Fidelity Home" concept involves my project Grid Resistor. This 2017 project utilized a very specific type of source material. Only recordings of machines were to be used. These were nearly all harvested from my home, using a contact microphone. The only additional sounds were from the beginnings or ends of cassette tapes or from a shortwave radio, between bands. Roughly eighty percent of the sounds heard in Grid Resistor tracks were from home appliances, captured in high-fidelity, then processed.

As a result, Grid Resistor tracks have an eerie familiarity to them. They are both ominous and industrial, and suggestively domestic. As the listener drifts off into meditation, he or she finds themselves-- at home. The listener is back at home, yet this environment is perceived differently-- perhaps as if through a microscopic lens.

I completed my Grid Resistor project in 2017. At that time, I moved generally away from composing music. But I did continue to record local devices. Recordings of, for example, my furnace, space heater, kitchen faucet and other appliances were harvested and released on Bandcamp for listeners' enjoyment, and/or for use in additional and supplemental recordings.

In an increasingly dangerous and expensive world, it makes sense to stay at home. A person's home, as they say, becomes their castle. "The High Fidelity Home" pays heed to this understandably popular environment, transforming sounds heard everyday into new sonic experiences.

Poetry

Here are a some poems I have written in the past years. Many appear on the "Spillwords" site, where I have competed for attention with thousands of hot-blooded young love poets.

I started writing poems when a co-worker introduced me to the works of Philip Levine. Mr. Levine's heartfelt dedications to real laboring people moved me, inspiring me to try my hand, and to pursue a similar voice and purpose.

Fast Food

Dedicated to Philip Levine

I bought my first car myself

The summer before spent flipping burgers

Pushing grease from the metal, fat

Dancing like a Cretan bull

Mornings came quickly, hardly a pause

The biscuit man, already there

Was covered in a white powder by 5 am

Frame emitting plumes of flour

From open to close, the drive-through voices

Rendered metallic staccato by microphone

Clattered sound waves off and about tile

A line would form, and food was served

Semi-palatable, the mouth and mind forget

Waist and pocketbook did not

A dozen frozen beef patties
Stuck on wax paper-- pushed hard, off
they came, and onto the grill
Rows and rows of pale green type
Mutely but relentlessly conducting
The rapid motion, heated preparations
The seeming never-ending cycle of cheap labor

Afterwards, the day grown mellow
Sapped of light, rush hour ending
Walked a mile home beside the road
On quickly cooling grass, occasional breeze
The bull was dead, the feast concluded
Drippings dried on cotton, denim
Washed away by streams of water, it was all
Only in one day, one very long day

The Librarian's Song

Dedicated to Philip Levine

So you like detective novels?
They are at the end and on your left
70000 items, one is lost
Can it be found in seconds' span?

How long does it take one child

To re-arrange a shelf of books?

If I have no documented proof

Of who I am or where I live,

May I have borrowing privileges?

This was a place for families, still is

To some degree, supposed to be for

scholars, too-- replaced in time to a large extent

By dvds and Nintendo

The section most popular? Computer lab

16 glowing portals into the web

Each patron his or her own librarian

Connecting images, snatches of words

Data, forms, and videos

If you stay, peruse the shelves

Grown dusty with disuse, dates

Stamped back, not since 5 years

Books deemed "dead", to be removed

Somewhat surviving field of knowledge

Trampled by financial necessity

Into colorful fairground

Ferris wheel of spinning footage

There for those who can't afford

Ownership

The librarian, clerk

Arranging instant symphonies

Percussive stacks of musical discs

Come and go, stack and fall

Case cracked, replace

And card renew

Entropy, a cart of books

The shelve's cotton skirt

Brushes gently as she walks past

Like a feather against a great mountainside

A Love Poem

"My humps". My bumps.

The poem, a tease

Erotic words, turns of phrase

Underneath photo

Of young photogene

Post-structure, vague of rhyme

Professor wrinkled nose

At seductive lines

Schoolgirl fantasy

To your credit, Ms. Appleby,

34 26 34 nymph

You are not

Nor have ever been

But 48-year old retail employee

Tired from lengthy shift

Eyes a bit baggy

Lonely as a bird in the desert

Love (or lust) should be your dessert

Never mind the bachelor degree

Tempo, rhythm, analogy

Use the word to find a man

Attract a mate

Ignore the mind

The Barista

Coffee is a fuel

To fill many tanks

Levers force hot water

Through compressed discs of powder

No Folgers crystals, but beans

Imported from Africa, Asia

Roasted to slightly bitter perfection

Lines form

Bursts of caffeinated chatter

Time served out in teaspoons and porcelain cups

The day's study topics

For the student barista

Reduced reassuringly yet brutally

To simple cause and effect

Recipe

Arithmetic

The morning rush of suits and students

Later brought blinking housewives with kids

Wiping sleep from their eyes

The sun peeked behind shades

The poor people from the halfway house

Shuffled in, heads nodding over coffee cups

Strained beans counteracting meds

Or speeding their effect

Coffee the one med, the permitted drug

Ordinary luxury

Life pressed tight into moments

Eyes propped open,

Only later to nod in counter-reaction

Away To School

The previous summer, had grown moody

Tired of routine, brashly

Exhausted of family

Total escape was the program

Call home only once every while

To college

On the waters of Lake Michigan

With lakefill, temperate

Rounded stones on sloped hill

Peaceful oasis, North of city

Where coffee, dancing, women

Were nightly features

Oh, and to study, my connection

To life before, by day

Submit to class, evening-- mild homework

By this path, become one's own

Professor of Romantic Poetry

Young, brunette, attractive

Taught works by Wordsworth

Where child of parents, farm-hand

Moved to city, merged with populace

Broke connections

My parents, just a half-day drive away

Somehow no closer then than Polaris itself

Their home and dorm illuminated after sunset

By pale and twinkling light of distant orbs

Chicago

The wind hits hard

Called "The Hawk"

Memories blown, currents of air

Twin lions protect the museum

Find your way by the Lake

Its waters your reference

The world can be seen

In a few blocks,

Neighborhoods Chinese, Dutch, African American,

"Altegeld"

Where I went to school, tried

To escape family

Rough trajectory

Years later, roaming the streets

Miles Davis in my head

Struggled to assemble change

To buy noodles, cigarettes

Almost every street I have seen

Many with friends from the University

Now city of

Urban cosmopolitans

Metropolitans

Black-shod hipsters, businessmen

Quickly walking

In tunnels of wind

Hardly looking, never slowing

Yet, I will never completely forget

The smell of grills in many diners

Concert halls

Cafes

The sights and smiles of good friends

In younger, better days

The Copy Center

Late '80's, a ragtag crew

This goes one of 2 ways

We help you, or you help yourselves

.08 per page, white 8 1/2 by 11

Make miracles from originals

Not always miraculous originals

With liquid paper, tape, scissors, glue

Feeding toner, reams of paper

In precise rectangles

The computer guy, with his own alcove

Steered us towards the future, back then

We did not know

Mornings meant teachers, ministers

Those busy in local commerce or government

Evening brought in weary students,

Rumpled businessmen

With stacks of invoices

Nights quite slow, erratic

Sometimes a heavy metal band came by

Making hand-drawn flyers for shows

While projects, stacks of sheets

Collated-- were fed though

Machines trembling, forever hungry

Yet always disgorging

My goal-- to remain anonymous

Blue-shirted, clipped tones

Exuding virtual reflections

Of customers notions

In professional fashion

For T.S. Eliot

Born in the same city

Saint Louis, far from England

Trained similarly

Though not as extensively

You were a poet in my curriculum

"The Wasteland", the song of "Prufrock"

As my wife and I walked by

The bronze bust

of T.S. Eliot

In front

Of the bookstore

A sweet sadness swelled

The poet, born with double hernia

Awkward, big-eared, sensitive

Viv left him for the philosopher

Who had bolder gaze

And broader appeal

A poem, then, for what should have been

For the world's most studied poet

If not most admired

These lines might not be admired

Why not then live a life, enjoyed

Love, happiness, intimacy

The drowned sailor

Cannot be revived

Whispers only survive

Acknowledge the reef where the waves pulled him in

Walk by, head on

Acknowledge, never be

Him

Knit Cap

Big Sleep

Dry light

Through dirty window panes

One long Winter, no

Central heat

My apartment, South Side Saint Louis,

Small already

Reduced in essence to one bed, where

Under the covers I lay

18 hours night

And day

Covered in Winter coat,

Knit cap

To keep the heat in

So cold, Somehow the faucet

Dripped still

The slow percolation of warmth

As it approached

But never turned

To ice

Onkama, Michigan

Rest In Peace, Grandma Mimi

I remember visiting Onkama

Temperate in summer, slightly cool

Half-block walk to the lake

Rolling down Angel Falls,
Steep slope of sand, laughing
Did not understand its meaning

Lovely town, white siding
Hotel, restaurants on edge of water

Sounds of waterskiers, boaters
While anglers gently dipped their lines
Near Portage Point

A day in the sun, returned
Sand in shoes, socks

Ate a cottled egg, fixed fresh
Cooked stirred hot in porcelain

Winter came, once the waves froze solid
Children played, walked yards out

Grandparents gone to rest, the Lake
Near their home
Whispers they have gone beyond
To a place of stillness and comfort

Ottawa, Kansas

Midwestern town, West of Kansas City

2 stops on the highway

Mundane to tourist?

Home and world to local

Residential blocks, houses of wood, brick, siding

Sloping yards well-tended

Converge in town's Center,

Grocery, bank, ice creamery

Down Main to rectangular, traditional schools

Library, city hall

Sunny park with rotunda

Crossing running water

To Grandparents' shop

Stately, solid warehouse

Inside, primitive furniture

Hand-painted signage

Wooden bas-reliefs of familiar faces

Across the street, the depot

Town museum, trains remembered

Ran through, departed

Home to grandparents and family friends

Rest in peace, Grandad

And Grandma

Santa Cruz

We spent a quick evening in the "City Lights" Bookstore

Rested up, boarders

In a house just off the Haight

Then it was South towards Santa Cruz

Short stop at the lighthouse

The beach was peaceful

A gentle side excursion

Between rides on the Boardwalk

After we gave coins to the fortune-teller

Your cousin served us wine

Made conversation

Her fair-haired husband returning later

(Time had little meaning)

From the waterfront,

Surfboard in tow

We spoke of moving to California

Leaving our emotional anchor

(Saint Louis)

But the millions of dollars

The earthquakes

The drought

The damp, chill sands of Santa Cruz

Remain in memory

Cool waves persist in time

Still caressing some tourist's sandaled foot

Saturday AM

Early in the morning

Springtime

The birds mated

Chirping loudly outside my window

Traffic sounds faded

To ambient noise, a dull hum

My pipes sang

Liquid, guttural

Chorus of water on porcelain

A celebration, loaf of bread

Jar of peanut butter

From the Shop and Save

(Food stamp benefits today)

Minimum wage, but Saturday

A whole day without organizing

Stooping, placing

My work as a shelver on reprieve

As the light shone in through slits

It fell on my waking body

A whole 24 hours to be free

A richer man there never was

Ode To The Modern Seafarer

I am the seafarer

On seas of information

Waves of web pages

News photos, popular music

Personal chronicles

Illness, babies born

Night brought on darkness

The housecat purrs my only lullaby

Monitor's glow evening's guide

Through data, song and image tide

The currents of currency

Ticking away with frequency

Still shots, stop motion

Life rendered in animation

The alarm clock sings its song

To the waves of data once again

Not collective unconscious

But collective conscious

Like relentless ants

Posting material fragments

Into one particular heap

The seas of memory sing to me

I give to them

A small shower of rain

Poetry Submission

Somewhat as Vegas

Words rattling like dice

Metaphors, playing cards

This is my submission

Derived from "submit"

I bow my head, offer

Lines carefully chosen

Approval sought, vindication

Rush of pleasure, affirmation

Poems made alone in room

Perhaps exposed to crowd in time

Submitting poet pondered

Ancient play of thought

When branch of tree fell

In wood where none could hear

Was there sound?

That time was taken, Energy

To form particular notions

Penses, rhymes

I would prefer, if like a limb
Had fallen to the forest floor
You sensed the crack of wood
On wood, earth, pebble

Wanted more

The News

Stanford scholar
Assaults woman unconscious

Right-wing reactionary
Runs against left presumed-puppet

Rogue One re-shot
With new director

Horrific flood washes over Texas

Transgender people
Have normal interests
Says Caitlin Jenner

Here I am in nightclothes

Quiet in carpeted room

Walls white, air condition

Wife asleep

My headline?

Disjointed

Part 1- "City Blocks"

Delmar Divide

Radical income discrepancy

Time partition, bandwidth

Empty or full, block by block

Sitcoms or spreadsheets

Building by building

Supply sedation, entertainment

Complicit to veiled agenda

Broken reflection, modern person

Haunting sound bytes, profiles, series

Accept the situation, find

Lucrative opportunity

Acquiesce

Get with the program

Take the offered hand, find peace

Or live on in pain and need

Part 2—“Underwater”

Underwater houses

Mutilation wave

Surf murder

Subsiding waters peaceful

An entire kingdom lives

Under the sea

With ecosystems

Hotels of coral

Plastic dumps

Garbage LaGrange points

Gentle giants, whales

Pass through the salty depths

Avoiding the land

Or larger ships

Civilian, military

Bearing commerce, toxic oil

Subsurface pipelines

Sonic booms

Survey the change in tides

The change in sea

Part 3—"Superman"

Desired connection

Digits, mobile device

Broken eye contact

Notify with sound or vibration

Split persona, public, private

Network doppelganger

Send my digital ghost

To haunt your house

To save your life, protect

Your young, There is

A ringing tone, a flash

Of light, it's just your

Phone

Blog Entries

Here I offer a series of blog entries. I wrote these in October and November of 2017, publishing them on my public blog site. My purpose was to explore living with paranoid schizophrenia. I wrote about my own struggles, and also the many confusions, challenges, paradoxes and mysteries present in today's world. I would like to think that these topics affect us one and all, crazy or sane.

A Schizophrenic Perspective

Views Of A (Fairly) Lucid Mental Health Consumer

Introduction

It started with the following Facebook post. I decided to admit to the world at large that I suffer from paranoid schizophrenia. Here is what I told my friends, family and acquaintances:

“Hi folks. I think it’s time I share something with you all. This is in the wake of a number of my fellow friends and musicians being honest about their lives and struggles.”

“I am living and having been coping for years with a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.”

“As a child and teen, I was deemed healthy and was a very successful student, among other things, graduating near the very top of my high school class, receiving the highest ACT score in the state and attending a prestigious university.”

“Something began to go wrong during my college years– possibly triggered by the use of marijuana and LSD. Or, it may have just been a part of my genes, triggered by my age.”

“In 1995, I received the diagnosis.”

“My early years with schizophrenia were quite difficult. I lost nearly everything I had. I felt that my life would never be normal again. My status dropped in every way. My family provided me shelter for some years, but there were also many years when I lived alone, with little money, on a government check and food stamps. I was quite isolated, shunning social interaction, spending most of my waking hours engaged in my own particular forms of creativity (notably my main and eventually very successful musical act, ‘Mystified’). I got a lot of joy and fulfillment from writing music, even though times were hard in other ways.”

“Through my years of isolation, I kept my diagnosis private. When I met the woman who would later become my wife, I shared my condition with her. I did this at an early point in our relationship. She was accepting and supportive from the very beginning. I am grateful to have found someone special like her.”

“Typically, paranoid schizophrenia is regarded as ‘degenerative’– i.e. it just gets worse with time. But with the proper medication, treatment and support, I have seen a slow but steady improvement. Now that I am 46, I am happy, happily married and steadily employed. My main and only major symptom, that of hearing voices, is kept in check with the love of others and a single pill I take every evening in small dosage.”

“I would like to clarify that, in spite of my condition, I have a high i.q. and am capable of clear logic and deductive thinking. I have strong spiritual beliefs, and they are not strange– rather they constitute Protestant Christianity. I am capable of giving and receiving love, and do so every day. Though I have a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, I now realize that my illness does not define me.”

“To give some examples of famous schizophrenics, John Nash, Syd Barrett (of Pink Floyd), and Jack Kerouac all lived with the diagnosis and achieved great things.”

“I wanted you all to know this, as I feel that keeping such issues quiet is not fully honest. I also want folks to see that conditions like this can be dealt with, and people who struggle, though they have their struggles, really can live full, happy, creative lives full of joy and value.”

“I believe there are those who may have guessed (or already knew) of my diagnosis. This may only confirm what they had suspected. Others may be surprised.”

“This goes to you all, as I believe in love and in the truth, to my fellow courageous artists who suffer too and who have revealed the truth, and especially to my family and wonderful wife who have helped me get to this point.”

“And here is to continued growth and improvement, towards the best, healthiest and happiest life I can achieve, with God’s grace.”

“If anyone has any questions, I am open to engaging in dialogue about the subject. Feel free to ask.”

That was the post, from October of 2017. I would like to add that the reactions to that post were universally positive and understanding.

From here I would like to begin sharing some thoughts on my illness— first-hand experiences with schizophrenia, rendered as lucidly as possible.

Schizophrenia And Modernity

I wanted to mention an interesting paradox created by mental illness. As a patient, I am told that my mind does not function properly. Since it is my mind, I have to accept this— that what I think is “not right”. Yet, I have to survive in this complex and ever-changing world. Any mind should probably doubt itself— but if it doubts itself profoundly, that makes survival difficult.

I have secretly had faith in my mind and my functionality all along. I have a high iq and and a great problem solver. I am glad I have this faith in myself, and hope that people in this world can find a way to avoid applying this paradox— suggesting that a person reject their own most basic thought processes.

Interestingly, this profound self-doubt is said to be part of the modern condition. An awareness of self, a rejection of several or many impulses (even essential or vital ones) is necessary for navigating this world. I realize that I am not alone— I am part of my age.

Isolation, Socialization

Sadly, one of my first tendencies as a schizophrenic was to isolate. I moved into my own apartment in South Saint Louis, and spent about 99% of my time alone. Much of that time was devoted to creative pursuits. It doesn’t take a genius to see, though, that, already being a bit eccentric, I slowly slid away from normalcy.

Steady influences included my family, and my job. Even volunteering once a week was helpful. When I moved on to working part-time, my contact with the everyday world, though awkward and stressful at times, was very helpful.

A movement has happened where lots of mentally ill people are assembled together in a “day program” environment. I tried that out, for a period of time. But– who’s to say that, just because people share the same or similar diagnoses, that they will get along well together? It may be that, at times, they might navigate one another further and further from what is called sanity.

On the other hand, a movement has happened where mentally ill people are treated as being almost completely independent. They live alone, shop for groceries, and so forth (as I generally did). How often is it, then, that the sufferer lapses into isolation, possibly watching endless hours of television, smoking pack after pack of cigarettes?

My most helpful contacts were with sane people. From them, I re-learned some of the language of real life. But, are sane people willing to walk side-by-side with the mentally ill? Would that frighten them? Offend them?

Some might suggest that it is already the case– that society is sick enough, and contains enough sick people, that the world is like one big outpatient clinic.

A friend shared with me that there are sociologists (such as Hartmut Rosa) who see essential flaws in modernity– that the pace of life has accelerated to the degree that most people are simply unable to cope. Stress is a huge problem in our society– with its mental, emotional and physical effects. Further, my wife and I often discuss how often it is nowadays that a friend or acquaintance admits to being depressed, maybe having a bi-polar condition. I would guess that a larger amount of the population takes anti-depressant medication than most people realize.

Roles

As a schizophrenic with a full-time job, one thing I am beginning to see is that a lot depends on how I define myself. I provide technical support at my job, and to the extent that I can portray myself (accurately) as someone who can help, who has information to share that can benefit patrons, I can assume some degree of leadership.

If I were to continually admit to patrons and coworkers that I was mentally ill, or experiencing symptoms, I would find that to be counterproductive, and I might even lose my job. If I did, I would really miss it.

If I can see beyond the illness, and how it tries to define me, and believe that I can provide assistance to others– if I can in fact realize this aim– then I begin to assume again the mantle of health.

In essence, if I can experience what sane people do on a regular basis, take on challenges such as theirs, and try my best to adapt to them without shooting myself in the foot, I can begin to regain clarity and purpose.

I would suggest that this experience could be shared by many mentally ill people– including many who spend most of their time isolated or participating in various forms of leisure.

A program like Ticket To Work (which I was a part of) allows patients to take on employment without immediately losing their benefits. Benefits are gradually tapered off, as the patient begins to participate more actively in the world of work.

I can't emphasize how much this program helped me, and how important it is for functioning mentally ill people to find a productive and somewhat social means to occupy their time.

It is important for schizophrenics to appear "above ground"—in the real world, as producers, not just as consumers.

The Music Scene

During my more isolated years, I decided to try to become a musician. That had always been a dream of mine, even before my diagnosis. I found myself with plenty of time every day to create and share music, and was fortunate enough to have a computer and an internet connection.

I networked with literally thousands of people, most of them being fellow musicians. At first I did not know, but in time began to realize, that many, many of these people were also mentally ill, or somehow marginalized. Most of the musicians participating in the online music scene, including the netlabel scene, which I was so much a part of, were eccentric in some way, or had characteristics people would define as off-center. They were sexually "different", living in poverty, and/or coping with addiction or health issues.

The internet music scene evolved into a large-scale phenomenon where connections were made and new and unusual expressions were shared. This seemed both exciting and at times disturbing.

The music scene definitely demonstrated that, thanks to the internet, all kinds of subjective experiences were being created and passed back and forth, often for free, and more than ever before.

One did not have to be a unique talent or millionaire to become a musician. It just took a computer and a few free programs. And so the gates were opened for all kinds of people (like myself) to participate.

Purpose

I was thinking of various purposes for this blog. I don't want to just talk about myself endlessly as a gesture of self-reference or vanity. Helping to de-stigmatize schizophrenia would be a worthy goal. I think, further, I'd like to suggest and convey that mentally ill people can be highly functioning people.

When receiving a diagnosis, it is often true that a person "drops out" of our society. They stop working, lose relationships, and fall off of the grid. The government sends them a check every month. They deposit it, and get by in a new and reduced way.

This saddens and frustrates me. I am highly able, though schizophrenic, and I know many others who are, as well. Functioning schizophrenics might not make the best bus drivers, pilots or surgeons. But there are many, many other possible roles we could play in society, and some might involve a degree of expertise or leadership.

I think that needs to be said, and hopefully believed. That mental illness does not have to mean that a patient's life is completely or permanently compromised. There is much more that can be done, more potential.

This is not all on the health care professionals, to witness to this issue. Many already believe it. It is for society at large, yes— and perhaps more importantly for the patient himself or herself. When the world says for them to take a bow, have a seat and become consumers forever, I would ask more able patients to resist the urge to accept this. To believe in themselves, that they can do great things. To make a genuine effort to do so.

Disjointed

Somewhat on a tangent, I would like to remark on the disjointed nature of modernity at large. Certain works of art, such as the film “Brazil” (Terry Gilliam, 1985), express this well— the sense (and reality) that things can change quickly, and that sudden and unexpected shifts often happen.

It is an experience of different worlds. There is the world of the city, of the suburb, of the country. Work has its own world, and home represents one, too. The presence of others changes how this feels, and this all can become very complex.

The city itself, actually, is a good metaphor— how, moving from one block to the next, we can see extreme differences in poverty level, crime, infrastructure, and so forth.

Modern life can be disjointed, like the lines of the figure in “Nude Descending A Staircase” (Marcel Duchamp, 1912).

How does this reference schizophrenia? I would suggest that modernity propels many closer to mental illness than they would prefer. It can be a crazy world— just read the news. Further, I would attest that schizophrenia can make it harder to transition smoothly between these various worlds— it is that shock of travelling from home to work, or from one city to another, and so forth, that is so problematic.

In fact, with cell phones, the internet and other technologies, modern people can find themselves moving from world to another many times in a minute— often, doing so all day every day. The schizophrenic may find this to be especially challenging.

Symptoms

I wanted to write a short post about 3 symptoms of schizophrenia. It is interesting, because they sound oddly like coping skills.

“A Change In Sense Of Self”— the patient adopts a new and different view of him or herself, at the onset of the illness. True— and true, too, that we all tend to regard ourselves differently in different situations. In this life, we may define ourselves, as, say, a husband at home, and a technician at work. Further, to the degree that we allow others’ opinions of ourselves to dictate our identities, we might adapt all kinds of fragmented or inconsistent views of ourselves. Nowadays, our sense of self changes, it can be quite fluid, whether healthy or not.

“Racing Thoughts”— the patient expresses that his or her thought patterns move more quickly than they should, and perhaps sporadically. That being considered, life in this consumerist, technologically advanced reality can very easily bring on and even to some degree necessitate thoughts that “race”. I

would even suggest that many people have racing thoughts— but that schizophrenics may find them harder to deal with.

“Flattening Of Affect”— the patient responds to stimuli in flattened and / or soft monotones. This symptom reminds me of trying to deal with crises in public, or any kind of escalating situation. Even healthy people have to step back, take a deep breath— and address things in level, calm ways.

Taken one way, these are symptoms of mental illness. In other ways, they are attributes of most peoples’ psyches in this changeable modern life.

Drone Music And Schizophrenia

Drone music is a genre that is an interest of mine. As the musical act, “mystified”, I composed literally thousands of pieces of drone music. The smooth, steady tones of this kind of music emerged with a purpose to bring on a state of calm— to soothe listeners, and perhaps even to induce trance states.

Pushed beyond a certain point, and drone can also resemble the “Flattening Of Affect” symptom— simulating cold, emotionless modes, even ushering them in.

Where to draw the line between a healthy sense of peace and an unhealthy lack of emotion?

Philip K. Dick

Philip K. Dick is a writer who is getting a lot of press lately. Among other things, he was a paranoid schizophrenic. There is a lot you could say about him, especially concerning certain ideas he put forward in his writings.

One major idea was that of subjectivity. PKD suggests that each person has their own point of view— which is legitimized by their unique experience(s). For example, in *Maze Of Death* (1970 Doubleday), he demonstrates that, in a small group of people, each person lives in their own reality, dictated by particular rules and traits.

A result of my own schizophrenia is that I am aware of this view, and often tempted to adopt it. The purer the subjectivity I accept, the more I can put forward my own perspective. Though it is said that I have a mental illness, a subjective view rather suggests that my reality is still my own and is therefore genuine, as much as anyone else’s.

What is the problem? There is such a thing as a social fabric. I can say that, for example, I am having an aural hallucination, or “hearing a voice”. If no one else can hear it, it would likely be dismissed as not being “real”. This preserves the social order. And, I am one to admit, as I work with the public, that listening to people talk to themselves, especially in any volume, can be quite disturbing. It’s all real to them, sure, but what about everyone else, and the things they have to do?

You might say that reality is democratic. If most people accept it, then it is seen as the case. I can claim subjectivity, but my view might be eclipsed by the majority, dismissed as being incorrect.

Some people I dialogue with suggest that we are moving towards an era where subjectivity will be the ultimate guideline. I am not so sure. If we are, I wonder if we can also keep peace and order.

The issue of subjectivity never really resolves for me, but can only be reduced to a dialectic, shifting between poles of value.

That being said, I think I can understand why PKD would think of things in a subjective way, and I do appreciate his many contributions to the world of thought, which are seemingly so relevant today—including his idea that the world itself, or environment, is like a character, and is subject to changing traits and qualities.

Time, Perspective, Madness

I once borrowed a friend's copy of Habermas' The Philosophical Discourse Of Modernity (1985)— a book of contemporary philosophy. I was a literature major, not philosophy, and I really struggled with the book. But there were a few ideas that resonated with me.

One was that of a modern reality of time. Habermas puts forward the notion of "*Jetztzeit*". The idea is that time moves in a particular manner, as experienced by people, in this modern world. We generally encounter a kind of "low" or "empty" time- filled with everyday commerce, interactions and events. On occasion, we come to experience a "sacred" or "holy" time— our profane lives are punctuated by these kinds of Messianic interventions.

A theory of mental illness might be, what if this experience with time is misinterpreted? What if a patient either applies the Messianic time to nearly all events, or refuses to apply it to any? That would result in the development of false ideas.

If you are sane, experiencing most of your life as this low time, and a mentally ill person tries to impress on you that every moment is extremely important, ardently sacred, that would seem strange to you, inaccurate, unreal— unhealthy.

A person who never has encounters with the sacred misunderstands peak events when they occur— again seeming unhealthy, missing important aspects of a whole existence.

Would it be possible for schizophrenics to learn of and accept Habermas' model? I am sure it was his view that "*Jetztzeit*" was reality, not just an opinion. It described our current modern mode. Therefore it would be helpful to be aware of this experience of time, and to try to share it with one another, and to accept it.

Has The World Gone Crazy?

Looking around at the world today, events in the news, and so forth, a person might wonder, "Has the world gone crazy?"

Well, from my point of view, I would say there is good and bad. On a positive note, the world will never consider itself insane— the majority of people will always accept their own perspective(s) as being real and legitimate. I believe that mental illness will continue to be perceived as a peripheral phenomenon—

that schizophrenics, for example, will be seen as sick or maladjusted, at least to some degree. Reality is somewhat democratic. It will be defined by what most people suggest, and therefore what most suggest will be construed as being healthy.

On the other hand, the bad—modernity, with its accelerating pace, frightening feedback loops and other phenomena, may indeed be stressful and challenging enough that it is causing “normal” people to increasingly have symptoms of mental illness. At this point, it seems that there are more people in therapy than out, and it is suggested that anti-depressants and related medications are so prevalent that they have started to pollute our drinking water. Stress is a killer, and few are exempt from it—those who are seem not to grasp things.

So, paradoxically, the world is not going crazy. But it seems like a lot of the people in it are beginning to act crazy themselves.

“Fake News”

Not long ago, my wife and I were watching a local news broadcast. It covered a meeting that was held locally, which my wife attended in person, concerning a topic many find to be relevant. When she watched the news coverage, she was angered that it did not reflect her experience with the meeting—only certain people were interviewed, and the report was very much presented from a particular and abbreviated point of view.

The news media communicates with what seems to be an “objective” voice. If a report or story is not called an “editorial”, then it is to be taken as truth.

Yet, increasingly, I wonder, what is truth? What is objective? Can we know and trust what we hear?

The schizophrenic is asked to throw doubt towards their impressions and hallucinations, in order to deduce what is healthy and true. Sadly, I feel that we find ourselves in a state as an entire society that we must do the same.

Paranoid, perhaps, of me, but I suspect that the main movements and tidings on a global scale have been largely shrouded in secrecy for decades. Few people know the “actual” truth—I feel that we are not meant to know, not trusted to, as citizens—sane or mentally ill. I write this, not really being into conspiracy theories, as I find most of them to be false.

The question remains— who makes a claim to an objective voice? Many have tried, many have made that claim. How many have achieved this with due sincerity?

“Blade Runner 2049”

My wife and I went to see this year’s big reboot, “Blade Runner 2049” (2017), last night. There is a new director (Denis Villeneuve), a new musician doing the score, yet many of the same original actors and actresses. The setting, main premise and other elements were created by Philip K. Dick, the writer mentioned in an earlier post who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia.

An interesting resonance, not to give too much away, was the lead character's ("Joe's") confusion over his identity. Though it was suggested from the beginning that he was a "replicant", (a genetically engineered android), certain developments complicate this description, and this becomes a profound issue for the character.

This resembles a problem that schizophrenics often deal with. Terrible to say, but when a person has a debilitating mental illness, it can be quite a blow to self-esteem. The patient may wonder if he is like others— up to par— even fully human. There are those who, publicly or privately, might judge or treat disabled people like they are less than normal, less than human.

This is complicated. Not only is it painful for the patient (who may more than anything want to be construed as able and normative), it is complicated for those who judge. If they know there is a mental health issue, this becomes a trait that is hard not to consider. In fact, though schizophrenic myself, I have found it is nearly impossible not to be at least somewhat critical or distrusting of other schizophrenics, due to their conditions(s).

One of the more powerful scenes in "Blade Runner 2049" is when Joe discovers that a memory of his, which he considered to be fake, "implanted", seems to have actually happened. The idea that he might be born of man and woman, "human", causes a dramatic emotional reaction, and leads him to question how he views himself, and how he is treated by others.

I would suggest that, in many ways, schizophrenia can be more of a difference than simply a weakness, and can assure you that I feel as fully human now as I did when I was considered healthy. I am probably better at some things now that I have this diagnosis, and certainly still have feelings, a spiritual life, relationships, and the various components that make a person whole.

I used to see a psychologist, and I asked him what makes a person healthy. Wholeness was his answer— that a person has a complete and nuanced life. A whole person is physical, emotional, and spiritual. I can confirm that a whole life can be achieved by a person who has a mental illness.

Can others view a schizophrenic person as being wholly human? Can the patient him or herself adapt this view, as well?

Perfection

In today's fast-paced world, there is at times a sense that people should seem "perfect"— they should be virtually omniscient. They should look great, at all times. Never stutter. Never show weakness.

These are impossibly high standards. A mentally ill person must certainly come to terms with imperfection. Keeping this flaw secret for years was very stressful for me— and this became more and more awkward until I felt I was positively insincere.

Meditating on Christianity, it is believed that Christ was perfect, and without sin. That being said, we mortals are imperfect, and can never be without flaw.

Of course, to complicate, we try to achieve perfection. It is in our nature to do so. But we are always reminded that only Christ was perfect, and that His life and suffering are meant to free us from this tendency (and from sin in general).

Perhaps one key to actual ability would be for us all, schizophrenic or no, to admit to our imperfections, to realize them, and then to work from there, with the assumption that, of course, we all try to help.

As my mother shared with me years ago, “We are all wounded healers”.

Serotonin

The pill I take, the only one for my schizophrenia, is Risperdol. I have taken it for many years. Lately, I have been gradually reducing my dosage, which is small anyway.

What does Risperdol do? It is a Serotonin inhibitor. It reduces the flow of Serotonin in my brain. Some may know that Serotonin has a lot to do with a person’s experience with pleasure.

It seems that, for whatever reason, the way I experience pleasure has a negative effect on my mental health, generally, and my concentration specifically. When I go off of the medication (which I have tried, but don’t recommend), I slip into a state of unfocused confusion.

I wonder if I am the only one, if schizophrenics are the only people, to notice that unhealthy relationships with pleasure, pleasure-seeking and the way the mind experiences these things, have a negative effect on one’s emotional and/or mental life?

Patient Power

A schizophrenic patient assumes, of course, a subservient or somehow complicit role with their psychiatrist, and with other medical professionals. This is important, it is necessary. It has helped me to seek treatment, and to remain on my prescribed medication.

There have been other benefits of treatment, as well as case-management. My psychiatrist helped to convince me to quit smoking. I am very grateful to her for that, and glad that I did. Several of my case managers suggested that I seek employment, which I did— and years later, I am happily and gainfully working.

Just the same, as a patient, I feel I need to meet the doctors and caseworkers halfway. At least halfway. I have to put forth an effort, too. It is wrong to expect others to spoon feed me everything I need in life and all I need to know.

Although I am schizophrenic, I still need to work hard, pay my bills and taxes, and live up to my various obligations. I recognize that there may be patients so incapacitated that they are unable to do these things, but I would recommend that mid- to high- functioning mentally ill people try to push their boundaries to see if they can handle more responsibility.

I would suggest that many people are capable of more than they realize.

It’s ok to hope for a miracle, but it takes effort, experience, and understanding to make things happen in the “real” world. Mentally ill people need to be more— gulp— self-reliant.

Schizophrenia And Intimacy

One of the main casualties of mental illness can be intimacy.

When I was first diagnosed, I remember thinking, “Ok. That’s it for me and women.”

The situation resulted in a complex. On the one hand, I felt unworthy of intimacy, like I was “damaged goods”. On the other hand, I felt increasingly afraid of being touched.

I took it as a challenge to my self-control. How little touch can I get by with? Can I keep people at arm’s length? Can I understand and control my own impulses, especially that of desire?

For many years, I lived in solitude, with little human contact. I did not even have a pet.

Slowly, something began to change. I started to listen to my body, to pay attention to my pain. I realized that I needed companionship, recognized that in some ways my life had become flat and two-dimensional.

I was at a friend’s birthday party, and I was struck by an intuition. I felt that I was going to meet someone special there. I introduced myself to several women– each admitted sooner or later that they either were uninterested, or already had a companion.

One woman allowed me to give her my e-mail address. She later became my wife.

To be honest, 5 years later and intimacy is still a complicated issue for me. But I am relieved that I have someone to be with, and glad that I finally began to realize that I can’t manhandle nature. I can’t force my needs for human touch away.

Nature is not ever fooled this way– not for long, anyway.

Dystopia

I am going to share what I call a “schizophrenic’s rejoinder”.

It is true that this is a world with many so called “able” people. True, as well, that with mental acuity, persistence, technology and other attributes, they can achieve great things.

True, also, sadly, that we can initiate all kinds of mastery games, including some that threaten the very existence of the planet, such as military escalation between rival nations, pollution, and global warming.

The strong survive and thrive, while our planet slowly teeters towards ruin.

I think this is one key to Philip K. Dick’s (and other writers’ and artists’) creation of and rendering of dystopias– worlds where things are just not the way they should be.

Being mentally ill can be humbling, but it also allows a person to step outside the mainstream for a fuller view of the kinds of things humanity does– both impressive and not so impressive.

What Crazy Isn't

Schizophrenia is a complicated syndrome of illnesses and symptoms that is hard to understand. Medical professionals themselves are still trying to figure out what it is, what causes it and how to treat it.

My main symptom is hearing voices. In the back of my mind, especially when I am alone, there is often a chattering of voices— those of people I know. These voices are not threatening, and are generally easy to ignore when I am in the company of others.

For me, crazy means the voices. It does not mean a lack of cognitive function. I am quite capable of deductive reasoning, problem solving and various other types of thought. Not only am I capable of them, but I apply them often— sometimes helping to resolve issues that sane people have.

The point is that schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses, don't necessarily mean that a person can't be reasonable, responsible or constructive. Sane people should be aware that mentally ill people can often be quite helpful and even genuinely inspired. Patients should realize that they themselves can still contribute to society, perhaps even mentally or intellectually, and not to let their "disability" hamper their own efforts to understand the world and their lives, make sense of things, and help.

After all, today's world needs all the help it can get.

Hallucinations

I must confess, I spend most of my waking hours in front of a screen.

I am not one to binge watch cable or immerse myself in movies. But I do spend much of my time online, and/or creating music, video or other media.

Having created so much of my own material, it's hard for me to play the role of media consumer. I often feel that I am being steeped in other people's ideas when I watch shows— that I am being subtly programmed or offered false information.

It is interesting to me— when a schizophrenic hallucinates, that is involuntary. But most of us essentially are voluntarily "hallucinating" most of the time, when we imbibe programs and other media.

A few months ago I tried virtual reality— it was quite immersive, very trippy. Reality became even harder to differentiate from projection. In the future, I firmly believe that most of us will interact voluntarily with collective "hallucinations" (or virtual environments) constantly.

For better or worse, we will most of us agree to hallucinate together.

Symbols

For most of my life, I wanted to be a painter. My wife encouraged me, a couple of years ago, to purchase an acrylic paint kit. I have been practicing my art since, and have developed some special techniques.

One is to use spray paint, together with acrylic paints. I don't intend to rip off the notions of graffiti artists, but I really do like the way graffiti looks, and particularly spray paint.

Another technique involves what I call “Dream Symbols”.

Dream Symbols are shapes or symbols that seem to suggest something vaguely textual, but are indecipherable.

They are a good representation of my early experiences with schizophrenia. For several years, I found myself unable to easily decode many of society’s taboos and signs. I tended to miss subtle references or innuendos, especially involving things like sexuality, race, money and power. I think, in a way, I was pushing this kind of input away, refusing to deal with it.

Perhaps this was partly because, as a schizophrenic, I did not accept myself and my place in this world. If I correctly interpreted society’s “symbols”, I would have to admit to my reduced and partially incapacitated situation.

So, my “Dream Symbols” paintings and prints depict my hazy and confused interpretations of the communications I was receiving from the world. By encrypting them, I protected myself from them.

Trying To Be A “Guru”

I am still not sure what triggered my schizophrenia, back in my mid-20’s. A good guess might be that the use of a lot of LSD over a relatively short period of time was part of the problem.

Even people without the gene for mental illness admit that recreational drugs can blur the line between reality and illusion. The experience of tripping on acid can be very powerful, at times terrifying, and is definitely not recommended for people who are mentally ill (or who have mental illness in their families). In fact, I would not recommend taking LSD to anyone.

Why did I take the LSD? I had gone off to school, and was on my own. My social status slipped a bit. I was no longer the big high school scholar, but on a campus with thousands of top notch academic types. Drugs were readily available and— I wanted to become a guru.

I wanted to become wise in the ways of the various levels of reality— to walk through the “doors of perception”. I wanted to be able to explain to people the way life really is. To have a legitimate perspective that transcended the everyday.

I learned eventually that LSD only helps to unhinge the mind. If anything, it makes it harder to understand higher levels of thought, at least in any constructive way.

Furthermore, gurus are people who others appoint to that status due to their wisdom- not people who simply quaff many hits of liquid acid and go on trips.

Whether or not the acid caused my diagnosis, I certainly regret taking it, and am completely clean of such drugs at this point. And I am grateful to be clean.

Vladimir Putin

It can be a strange thing to live in this world.

A trait of human experience is “intuition”—that feeling that one knows something, but can’t explain how. For those with a keen sense of intuition, they are often right about things. Sometimes they are correct enough that it becomes hard to explain.

Back in 2015 I developed a fixation with Vladimir Putin. I had a feeling that he was going to become a bigger player in the world political scene. This feeling had no factual basis, but I felt sure it was true.

I composed a series of prints and an album of music based on Putin, which I called “Sovereign” (Treetrunk Records), back in 2015. I tried to capture the sense of mystery and fear I felt when I thought about Putin, and his possible rise in power.

Was it a coincidence that, roughly one year later, Putin became a center of global attention for his possible interference with a major U.S. election— and that this attention revolved (and revolves) around issues of “Sovereignty”? That some even suggested that this man has a hidden role in the U.S. government?

Easy to dismiss, perhaps, but I still recommend that people hold on to their intuitions, be they schizophrenic or no.

Muting Our Inner Voices

It is my feeling that most people live a great deal in denial, muting their inner voices and refusing to listen to the realities of life. This being said, I understand. There are certain fundamental absurdities about being human.

For example, we all will die one day. When that happens, we can believe in transcendence, but we can not know that until this passage happens.

But, how can we live our lives, fulfilling our obligations, when we are focused on imminent demise?

I grew up in the 1980’s at the end of the Cold War. It was a strange thing to be a kid, living in fear of the bomb. News about nuclear weapons showed up in a lot of our newspapers and news reports. It added a surreal, paranoid quality to life. As an eighties kid, you never knew if you would see adulthood, or old age.

Because we have to filter our thoughts, and push down certain things we know, some of our faculties become impaired, I believe, and it is my theory that our awareness and sensitivity returns occasionally in flashes of insight, revelation, or moments of peak emotion.

This is a bit like Habermas’ theory of modern time, with its “*Jetzeit*” (or “empty”) time, shot through with moments of Messianic time.

On The Dole

When I learned that I would be able to survive on SSDI (Disability Benefits), I was, at first, relieved. I believed that I would never have to work again. I could just collect my check, and live a decent life that way.

Over a period of years, I got between \$600-\$800 or so a month, and some other benefits, including EBT (food stamps), rent assistance, Medicare and Medicaid. All of this was very helpful and I was lucky to receive it.

That being said, it was not a lot of money. I got used to living on soup, frozen burritos, beef patties, and breakfast bars. I smoked cheap cigarettes— GPCs. I rarely if ever bought clothes. If I was lucky, I would travel once a year (my yearly trip to Chicago). I survived, for sure— but I did not thrive.

I did not want to recognize it, but I suffered a lack of self esteem from living this way. My family had a strict work ethic, and they tolerated my lifestyle but never really approved of it. I did have lots of free time, but I struggled to find things to do with it. Without my music project, I am not sure what I would have done.

Things are better, now that I have decided to return to the world of work and to get married. There are no longer mice running around my kitchen, or substantial and constant leaks in my bathroom. The tiles in my shower are not flaking from the wall.

I do understand how it feels to live a life of poverty now. Given that I was raised with plenty of resources, this was an eye opening experience. It's something about me that not everyone might realize— I, too, waited every month for my EBT award to come through. I also collected “circuit breaker” benefits from my property taxes. I went for years wearing the same sneakers.

I lived on the dole with all of its advantages and disadvantages, and I chose to leave that life for a more independent one.

The Groovy Sound— Of Schizophrenia

The music act I started, “mystified”, was a main preoccupation during my years of isolated suffering. The project was both a huge time suction, and perhaps, a saving grace. It gave me something to think about. I helped me to set and maintain goals. And even though I never was signed to Geffen or appeared on America's Top 40, I did pretty well.

The netlabel scene was where mystified really got a response. Thanks to the mentorship of people like Christopher McDill (Webbed Hand Records), and others like him, the audio that I posted for free, usually to archive.org, began accumulating thousands upon thousands of listens and downloads.

To me, this was very exciting.

Reality, some would say, is often poetic. One of my biggest releases, “South City Spring” (2006 Treetrunk Records), was created using phonography. I recorded sounds in my shabby, low rent apartment, and used the sounds to create songs. These gritty sonic collages appealed to the masses.

Sometimes mystified sounded glib, smooth or abstract. But when my project was the most honest sound-wise and thematically, it did its best.

Listening to releases such as “South City Spring” and “Nocturne” (2006 Treetrunk Records) remind me of the 'oughts— that ten-year period of living alone and working night and day to record and compose my

own “schizophrenic sound”— the drip of a faucet, clink of metal from a pot or pan, the creak of a wooden floor, the slamming of a door.

Talking To Myself

As I have mentioned, my main symptom is that I hear voices.

Usually, I am able to recognize that they are just thoughts in my head. On occasion, though, when I am alone, I start to vocalize words— to converse back and forth with myself.

This must seem strange to people, and when my wife discovers me doing this, coming home unawares, or hearing me in the shower, I feel ashamed. Encountering another person, a living breathing human, reminds me that the voices are like pretend ghosts, and that it is silly for me to acknowledge them.

Being in the company of others is one of the best remedies for the voices. The tendency for schizophrenics to isolate can be tragic, as that tends to be one of the worst things we can do. We lose focus, loosen our grip(s). We drift off, our symptoms begin to appear.

Sometimes when I am working, or moving about in public, I come across people who verbalize their voices freely, even when others are around. I feel bad for these people, though I know how that can happen.

I would conjecture that a keener awareness of the presence of others, and its significance, might help these people to become more still, to calm or silence the impulses that compel them to speak out loud to themselves.

Going Blank Again

There is a symptom of schizophrenia called “a poverty of thought”. In other words, the patient simply has fewer thought processes going on than healthier people. Hence, they might seem disengaged, helpless, staring off into space, and so forth.

I felt that I was experiencing this for a period of time. I would attribute it to a general feeling of hopelessness. Why mull over the problems of the world when life is so absurd, and there are so many issues? Maybe it is best just to put them out of one’s mind.

I eventually felt that this was not the best of habits, so I tried to re-engage, finding various activities, creative and otherwise, to think about. Being married, and having 2 cats, also helps in this regard.

That being said, I would say that feeling guilty about empty or quiet states of mind is ultimately a bad idea. If a person feels at peace, that is really ok. If a person can’t connect at all, can’t function, then, obviously there is an issue. Otherwise, I wish I had never worried about the poverty of thought symptom.

Just today, I was feeling tired and out of ideas. I tried not to be concerned about it, and let it happen, and I am still fine.

Gestalt Theory

Gestalt Theory suggests, as I understand it, that we humans tend to perceive to some degree what we expect to perceive. For example, if I am thinking about the color red, there is a good chance I will notice instances of the color red in the world around me, more than if I had not been thinking of it.

Schizophrenics are known for having false ideas, and I wonder how many of these are bound up with a form of Gestalt. If a patient already thinks the FBI is tapping their phone, and a funny noise comes through the signal during a call, that will only corroborate their theory.

Even if the sound had to do with a cell signal issue, some storm somewhere, because the patient has this theory, their perceptions will fit that theory. They will attribute what they see, hear and experience to their expectations.

I feel that Gestalt Theory has good and bad aspects. On the one hand, we really do shape the way we take in the world around us, we have some authorship. On the other hand, we can become trapped in the world as we interpret it, bound to own own interpretations, which may be limiting at times, or false.

Keeping an open mind, and engaging in dialogue with others, would be good tools to combat the negative sides of Gestalt-style thinking.

Martin Luther

A figure who was a helper to me on my path was Martin Luther. I mention him not because he was critical of the Catholic Church. Rather I mention him because of his intense spiritual struggle, and the solution that he found.

History suggests that Martin as a young man was wracked with guilt—guilt that never went away. To remedy his spiritual situation, he tried a number of strategies. He flagellated himself. He fasted. He sang hymns for hours on end. He prayed. He confessed.

Finally, Luther arrived at a solution which had personal and spiritual ramifications. He conceived that Christ (and therefore God), was outside of himself. Christ abides, according to Luther, in Heaven, and Luther himself, in his own body and mind, can only gesture towards Christ— to praise him, pray to him, and so forth.

By differentiating himself from Christ, Luther was able to forgive himself, and to more effectively ask for God's grace.

As a schizophrenic, if I can distinguish my own mind and body from that of God, I can more readily understand the world around me, the people in it, and the universe at large. Incidentally, I am not the first mentally ill person to reach this conclusion, both about Luther, and as Luther did.

Sense Of Self

A symptom of schizophrenia can be “a change in sense of self”. The patient views him or herself differently, after onset.

When I was initially diagnosed, the psychiatrist suggested that I thought I was Jesus Christ. I was sure I wasn’t, but there must have been something strange about the way I was coming across.

One change was that I stopped seeing myself as a discrete and whole entity. I was no longer an “acting figure” in life. I became very submissive. I was interested in saying only the right things at the right times, as others willed them to be.

Trying to please everybody is a trait I still have— it’s something I struggle with. I think, in a way, it shows that I care. But people pleasing can go too far— it can seem false, or make people feel uncomfortable.

I have seen this in other schizophrenics— they always have to be the friendliest people in the room, and they are often very deferential. Mentally ill people need to give themselves credit, no matter what life or diagnoses suggest.

We need to remember that we are people, too— that we have roles to play, and places in the bigger picture. We can make changes happen, in big and small ways.

In short, schizophrenics need to be— gulp— assertive.

MTV

I wrote a bit earlier about the disjointed nature of modern life— the quick transitions from world to world, setting to setting.

Back in the 1980’s, when I was a teenager, a new network emerged called MTV. This was a music channel that displayed music videos— often back to back for longer periods of time. Music videos were new to the world, and so was this kind of programming.

It spoke to the increasingly jarring nature of reality. Instead of slower-paced dramas or sitcoms, using the same characters over months or even years, programming was comprised of short snippets of media, perhaps shown again but appearing in different sequences.

The music was loud, there were lots of new sounds, and there was lots of rock and roll.

MTV lessened the strain on our attention spans— and it also spoke to the rapid pace and quick transitions that are so characteristic of modern life— and that can be so difficult for schizophrenics to navigate. I can testify that, with my diagnosis, it can take some time and energy to assimilate to new situations and environments. Life can feel more like MTV than a soap opera.

Later on, MTV changed their format, and explored the world of reality television. Again, this was innovative. It brought up a new idea— putting “normal” people in front of cameras for prolonged periods of time.

I would suggest that this was an abnormal phenomenon. Being on camera is different than being off. A person tends to be aware that they are being watched— they hold themselves differently, their speech is

more contrived– they tend to be more on edge– even paranoid. Reality television is not really “reality” as we know it– it represents a new kind of reality– a televised reality.

In fact, my paranoia often feels a lot like I am on camera. I sense that others are somehow watching me, listening to me, tuning in. When I am alone, I am rather part of a community, a network. The sensation is pretty convincing. It reinforces the notion that MTV accurately depicted ways that modern people think– be they natural and healthy or no.

Musique Concrete

As a schizophrenic, I might ask– what is reality? What am I really experiencing? Is it authentic? If I share my experiences with others, will they invalidate or deny them?

I would suggest that in today’s world, it is getting harder and harder to distinguish reality from artifice, more and more difficult to establish what is authentic. This can be disorienting for anyone– and is especially so for a schizophrenic.

One example of the blurred lines between things is the type of music called “musique concrete”. In traditional “abstract” music, actual instruments or voices are used. A musician, or musicians, sing or play instruments in tandem.

In the modern era, recording techniques have led to the emergence of Musique Concrete, in which recorded portions of sound are used as components. Often, musicians do not play the music at all– it is assembled, or mapped out in a software program– as segments of audio that are manipulated and arranged.

This can be somewhat disorienting. A non-instrumentalist can make a song that makes him or her sound like they play in an orchestra. A man can use a female voice, or effect his voice to make it sound effeminate– or, he can make it deeper, more masculine. Traditional musical sounds can appear alongside other sounds– field recordings, sound effects, and so forth. A musician can use “loops” (or repeating pieces of sound), to create the impression that the same phrase has been played again and again.

As a result, it is hard for me to say what I am hearing, and how it was created. I literally have no idea how much of a piece is “authentic”, and how much is “artificial”, or somehow canned.

I find that this kind of music is not altogether unpleasant, but it does raise questions.

Musique concrete represents one of many ways that modern reality works against traditional experiences, which, again, can be confusing for mentally ill people (and, frankly, for healthy people, too).

A person has to either be extremely sharp and prepared, or they need to let go, no longer worrying about the authenticity of what they see and hear– giving in to the levels of artifice present in today’s world.

As technology improves, our ability to blur the lines between real and imaginary worlds progresses.

The use of “CG” (or “computer generated”) effects began some time ago. I remember watching the film “Tron” (1982) as a child. Though it looks primitive today, computers were used to create an entire universe in that film— interestingly, it was a universe inside a digital network.

George Lucas was a big proponent of CG effects, much to the chagrin of some of his fans. He was one of the first directors to add entire CG characters to a major film (such as in “Attack Of The Clones” [2002]).

Early CG characters did not fare so well, in terms of popular reaction. Viewers could easily tell that the figures were “not real”— that they were generated, and did not belong to the visual universe of the film.

Years later, and CG has become eerily advanced. Older characters, from actors or actresses who have aged or died, are being digitally resurrected into films. For example, the Rachel character from “Blade Runner” (1982) reappeared in “Blade Runner 2049” (2017)— and did not age a day in several decades, by all appearances.

It is a powerful ability, to use computers to create nearly any imagined image. It has already been an issue in news media that doctored, “photoshopped” images have been mistaken for actual ones.

As a schizophrenic, I have trained myself to doubt my senses. Perhaps we are approaching a time when we all will have to question what we experience.

If virtual reality catches on (and I believe that it will), I wonder how much of a grasp of the authentic, material world we will retain?

North Korea

I have mentioned the uncomfortable, paranoid feeling of growing up in the 1980’s, with the Cold War going on. A friend of mine pointed out that kids these days have similar fears.

Indeed, I am worried that we may be resurrecting the Cold War mentality. There has been escalation with Russia in the past years, and, of course— there’s North Korea.

North Korea, led by the sinister Kim Jung-on, has been threatening to nuke the United States for many years. So effective is their media campaign, that nearly every week, a new threat emerges from this small but militarized nation.

It raises the question— should we be afraid? Should we live in fear of North Korea? If we believe what we see and hear, we should be afraid, indeed. A nuclear war could easily claim millions of lives— and by all reports, North Korea is increasingly able to start one.

Or— should we doubt our senses? Ignore the news? Life is hard enough without issues like this, after all. How are we going to get through the work week, if we have to worry about Kim Jung-on and his whole bizarre campaign?

I hope that my sane friends are not starting to feel a bit like I do. Paranoid schizophrenia is not an enjoyable condition.

In Public

I wanted to add a quick post from work.

I am at my full-time job now. I feel nearly symptom free, and calm but alert. It has been nice to help quite a few people with their technological needs today.

I feel whole— almost sane.

The fears and blurred reality thoughts from my other posts seem especially paranoid from this perspective. These issues, and issues like them, have retreated to the background. That must be because my other posts were all written in my home environment. I usually write in solitude, now I am in the company of others, and have a role to play.

Having a job demands steady attention, and awareness. This is a great help to my schizophrenia. Work is not always easy, but I would definitely recommend it to many more mid- to high- functioning schizophrenics.

Take a chance, work alongside the sane. Help others. Heal yourselves.

45

It's a strange experience to see popular culture influencing politics. Some would say that Ronald Reagan pulled it off pretty well in the 1980's, though I am not sure the extent to which he was mainly a figurehead for his cabinet and others.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was known both for being "The Terminator" and the Governor of California.

Donald Trump, I always thought, was a successful businessman, and quite a character, with his own reality show. He was a campy figure— showing up on the wrestling network, making crass comments, and so forth. A symbol, both of American success and its corruption.

Trump's Presidency has further blurred the lines between reality and fiction for me. He tweets late at night, often impulsively. He hires and fires staff members like he's running a fast food restaurant. He puts forward a consistently campy persona. He still seems like a caricature— larger than life. He is still Donald Trump, mainly himself, and it's strange seeing him in the White House, instead of in a casino or a pool hall at a nice hotel.

I don't disavow everything he has done. He seems very adept at manipulating mass opinion, and in this era that is important. I wouldn't call him stupid. He does seem to have a certain horse sense. And some of his policies are helping the economy— at least for now.

But I have never in my life seem a President act and speak the way he does.

I guess you may be detecting a theme in my posts. My wife suggested that I should not associate so many topics with my mental illness. So what does 45 have to do with schizophrenia?

Just that the world itself feels less sane every week.

It really does.

Radical Doubt

Looking back on many of my posts, and thinking about the world we live in today, a possible coping mechanism would be to institute a practice of “radical doubt”.

By this, I don’t mean a person should abandon all faith.

I think they should consider what they sense— and how to respond— before they believe in the authenticity of things. If they read an article in the paper, they need to ask who wrote it, and from what point of view. If they see an image, it is important that a person knows if they are getting a complete and accurate picture from it. Video footage, too— any media— can be doctored.

This comes from a paranoid schizophrenic, so you may choose to dismiss it. And that is fine, if you do, it’s your decision. But I do know that I apply a rigor to my own thoughts and impressions, and definitely filter what I take in— and disregard a great deal of it.

In my own experience, there really isn’t that much to know, of the things that a person can know at all.

To me, radical doubt makes a person mature. It differentiates a child from an adult. It is also what kids see in their parents that they fear or make fun of. Using radical doubt, though, isn’t really being a “stick in the mud”. A person can doubt many things and still believe in the important ones.

If there is any hope for this world, intelligent people need to question what they take in and establish their own realities. They then can react to the world’s changing and confusing stimuli effectively.

The Voices Are Real. . . Or Are They?

Did I tell you about how I tried to explain that the voices I hear are real?

One mistake I made, when I did this, was that I quoted the Bible. When a schizophrenic person quotes the Bible, a lot of times that is a bad sign. People start to shake their heads, even walk away in disbelief.

The Bible mentions certain spiritual gifts, such as the abilities to perform miracles and to prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:8–10). If a miracle is possible, what isn’t? Additionally, many Biblical figures mention hearing the “voice of God”. Did they hear an audible voice? Was it a thought? Or were they just schizophrenic?

After all, the voices can be very uncanny, and their resemblance to the sounds and thoughts of people I know are so close as to often be convincing. How could this chatter be something I made up? Is my mind that creative?

Humans sense more than we let on. I can tell when my wife is upset, and perceive others of her moods, fairly easily. And its more than just body language, by the way— there are things about a person’s presence that we experience without acknowledging. I would have to say they have to do with a spiritual reality.

If we can sense things as ephemeral as moods and emotions, who is to say that certain sensitives can't hear thoughts, or voices, of others?

When I made an attempt to explain my theory with my psychiatrist (a very helpful and friendly woman), she immediately increased my daily dosage of Risperdal.

Repetition

My wife shared with me a trait she attributes to my illness— that, particularly in art, when I start a kind of task or trend, I do the same or a similar thing over and over again many times.

I often defended this as “practicing”— or, as Brian Eno suggested in his Oblique Strategies cards, “Repetition Is A Form Of Change”.

That is my view.

To my wife, a repetitive work ethic seems strenuous and extreme, and lacking in variety. She feels that it is my schizophrenia that prompts me to create in this fashion.

Perhaps an example of this would be my musical project, “Grid Resistor”. As Grid Resistor, I created over 26 hours of industrial drone textures in about 5 months. All sounds used in each piece were machine sounds that I had recorded. Each release was over 1 hour in length. The tracks had a naming convention, based on the date and point in the day that they were recorded. There was one release for each letter in the Greek Alphabet, and that letter was the release title.

A record label called the Grid Resistor project, “a window to an introspective and sterile world”.

Another example of this kind of creativity was when I used certain graphic processes to pixelate and otherwise manipulate photographs. I made hundreds of images, therefore, based on squares. This concerned my wife, who suggested that people had no need for so many works that were so similar.

All of this activity seemed perfectly normal to me. I am not sure how my friends on social media felt. The only phenomenon I noticed was that they tended to pay less attention if I did too much of the same thing.

What do you think? Do I exhibit good practice or is my creative process twisted and obsessive?

Can You Believe Me?

It used to be said that “A man is only as good as his word”. This saying is probably not considered to be hip, as it is gender exclusive. Nonetheless, it does point to an accepted notion— that to be valued involves being trustworthy. If you say it, you must mean it, in order to be believed.

How can people believe the words of a schizophrenic?

This was a big problem for me, especially at first. Whether it was the illness itself, or just how I was coming across, people tended to doubt the things I said. I often became frustrated, particularly when I was being as honest and as genuine as possible.

I remember once I was in a room full of people. I looked outside the window and saw raindrops coming down. I said, "It's raining today."

Someone turned to me and replied, "No, it's not."

Of course, I can understand, in a way. If I am hearing voices, or have other symptoms, such as false beliefs, paranoia, and so forth— can I myself be trusted?

Interestingly, modern literature often involves the assumption that there is no completely trustworthy narrator. All characters in a book, including the one whose voice we channel, are human and therefore flawed. There is no modern Percival.

Yet, I would hope that people might consider that schizophrenics, too, want to be believed, problematic as that may seem. And, they may often be right about their notions, or at least they may present a viable and valuable point of view.

I am glad to report that, as I got older, more and more people placed their trust in me, be they family members or others. One, my wife, even calls me- "Her rock."

Loops

In my various musical incarnations, including "mystified", I recorded using loops. Loops are pieces of media that are used repetitively. Often, they simply continue, without changing.

With loops, a small amount of material can easily become much longer.

Life has many loops. For example, there is the work week. Mondays are often very similar to one another, at least for me. Fridays have a particular character.

The sun has a certain motion across the sky, daily, and annually, too. We have morning, noon, and night. Also, there are Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall, with all of their various attributes.

I know that every Fall, I remember the feeling of going back to school after summer break. I am not sure what triggers this— maybe it is the smell of decaying leaves (it is said that smell often prompts memories).

Thought processes, too, I feel tend to run in cycles. We may believe that we think in a linear fashion, but actually, we tend to run over the same or similar thought patterns many times a day.

What causes a sense of disorientation, whether listening to a song with lots of loops in it, or thinking about other loops, be they in our minds or in the world around us, is when our perspective shifts.

Recently, when I have my "back to school" thoughts, they come with the recognition that I do not actually have to buy school supplies, or plan to study again. That is all from the distant past. I both anticipate school, and realize that it will not actually be part of my life.

Then, the source of repetition provides a familiar input, but where we stand in relation to it shifts. As Brian Eno suggests, in his Oblique Strategy deck, "Repetition Is A Form Of Change".

This relationship between the changeable self and a static reality can feel strange– “trippy”, as some might say. Mentally ill people may find it to be particularly unsettling.

Whether healthy or schizophrenic, modern life’s tendency to repeat itself, to run in cycles, is very much a part of human experience.

The Body

I have been thinking a lot about how thoughts have a physical nature to them. Of course, we like to consider ourselves to be spiritual (or, nowadays, mostly cerebral), but in fact, the way we feel and even think has a lot to do with our bodies.

When I am physically calm and comfortable, I can think more clearly.

My wife and I always see certain things differently– I think this has to do with physical differences tied to our gender(s).

The medicine I take inhibits Serotonin in my brain. Serotonin is associated with experiencing pleasure. So, what, in part, keeps my lucid has to do with my body feeling less pleasure.

I wonder if, instead of associating most of what we feel and think with a sort of identity, we were to admit that a lot has to do with our bodies, and how we treat them, and how they are treated.

By no means does this mean that a person would only experience pleasure, at all times, forever.

Perhaps, though, they could admit that what pain there is is sometimes needed to produce clarity– to survive in a complex and changing environment.

I have had a bad history of denying my physical nature and needs and I feel sad for people who still can’t see this about themselves– who rock back and forth uncomfortably, refusing to associate sadness and anger with personal, corporal pain.

A Strong Intuition

A powerful intuition seized me today, that might help to resolve some of the reality versus illusion posts I have made, and some of the issues in them.

It was that there must be a firm duality, a difference, nearly a Cartesian one, between the world of sensory experience and some kind of emotional or spiritual world.

For example, if I am home with my wife, I can watch a program on my laptop– presumably for as long as I like. That does not eliminate my awareness of, or the reality of, my wife’s presence. It does not cancel out the significance of our relationship.

Humanity may indeed be heading down a proverbial rabbit hole. With virtual reality imminent, I think it is essential to grab hold of something real. That is a kind of interior reality, where relationships, love and faith exist.

We have to hold tight to the yarn that we let loose as we walked into the labyrinth.

I would go so far as to suggest that, insofar as a person is able to grasp this duality, this division between the sensory and the internal or spiritual, that dictates the individual's ability to lead a sane and worthwhile existence.

Note that I am not trying to moralize away the world of the senses-- only to suggest, to remind, perhaps myself if no one else, that sensory experiences will forever be apart from the worlds of the heart and soul.

Show Me

Do me a favor-- distract me. Not from my purpose, but from myself.

You can put an end to my inner conversations by offering me real things to talk about, and actual people to talk with.

My meandering creativity, which so often slowly moves away from the world of work and commerce, can be reoriented, made to focus, when it is given a purpose, when its activity is requested or needed.

If I feel I have a reason to try, and an avenue in which to do it, I can achieve great things.

I can't help but to wonder how true this is for so many mentally ill or other disabled people, as well as the elderly and others pushed to the periphery of our culture.

How often is it the case that at issue is not a lack of ability, but a lack of purpose. Not less talent than is required, but the need for a means to express it.

Point me to a road to a better life, and I might just take it. I doubt that I am alone in this.

"Normal"

I have schizophrenia, yes.

But to me, I am normal.

If I think about it, that's true. That's because I recognize my own thoughts, experiences, and means of processing things. My life is predictable enough, steady enough, that I know what to expect. Plus, I am now 46-- not a kid anymore.

That's what's so strange when one is mentally ill, and light is shed on one's thoughts-- as being abnormal. Because, to the patient, of course, they are quite normal-- habitual, even.

I have been going back and creating some mini-documentaries about my old musical projects. One of them, "AutoCad", had a lot to do with numbers-- fractals, equations, and so forth.

I spent some time jotting down my memories about that act, and read them out loud into a recording device.

Hearing my thoughts later, I was like, “Man, people would think that is weird.”

AutoCad involved some strange ideas, and it may be that the world would not readily accept them.

So, for sure, when speaking with others, especially the mentally ill, it might be best to remember that to them, their thoughts and reactions might not seem very shocking– no matter how unusual they might seem to you.

Frozen Burritos

Alas, as an isolated schizophrenic, not only was I poor, but often lacking in judgement.

One way this manifested itself was through my diet.

At one point, through a combination of Olanzapine and unhealthy eating, I weighed over 270 pounds.

I had only one pair of pants that fit, and could not stand my appearance. Nor was it healthy.

I remember frozen burritos– bleach-white tortillas containing a gritty bean and beef paste.

I remember Holton meats. These were beef patties that came in packs of 20. I would grill so many of them that the smoke and soot changed the color of my kitchen. When I read the ingredients of Holton patties, I noticed they contained, among other things, beef hearts.

I remember Totinos pizzas. They look like microwave pizzas, and used to cost about a buck apiece. But you still have to fire up your oven to cook them.

I remember Ramen– 3 packages for a dollar. Boil the noodles up, and fill your empty stomach.

I remember Pop tarts.

I remember chewy granola bars.

I remember extremely cheap whiskey. I stopped drinking that because I did not ever know how much I was taking in.

I remember two-fer beers– you know the kind-- tall boys. These were for when you are poor enough that you can only think of today– really, only this hour of the day.

I am not exactly Julia Childs nowadays, but things have gotten better. When I backslide, my wife voices her concern, and I redouble my efforts to eat a more healthy diet.

If anyone wonders why schizophrenics tend to live shorter lives– well, it’s not mental or emotional. It’s the crap they eat, drink and smoke.

Aliens

I am going to write a post about Aliens and U.F.O.s, but I don’t think this is the post you are expecting to read from a schizophrenic.

Not long ago, it was revealed that the legendary military site, “Area 51”, which was said to have been involved in all kinds of top secret U.F.O. activity, was actually used for many years as a testing stage for high-performance military aircraft. The strange lights and other phenomena people reported were actually planes built by the U.S. for military purposes.

I pretty much don’t believe in U.F.O. sightings, and I think the footage we see is of other things, or it’s been doctored.

As for aliens, I have done some incidental research, and I believe that Americans’ fascination with aliens in the 1950’s had to do with the Soviet Union. I am not sure if military propagandists started it, but fear of aliens was just another form of “Red Fear”. The aliens were a symbol of the unknown invader—powerful and with high technology. The aliens represented our terror of a Russian invasion. I think that was all it was, plain in simple.

Yes, the truth is “out there”— but not that far.

Very Strange Ideas

Being a schizophrenic, I am sensitive to the fact that some of my ideas might be taken as false— that I my thoughts might be held into question. I don’t like thinking that, but I do admit that it is probably a good idea— not only for me, but for people in general— that thoughts are considered before they are accepted as truth.

I have heard some interesting notions myself, and am often not sure if the people who voiced them were mentally ill or not.

My wife and I shared a cab after a trip, and the cab driver insisted that Hillary Clinton was one of many “reptile” people. He felt that the reptile people came from somewhere other than the Earth, and that they intended to take over the planet.

I hear lots of political and financial ideas. One man told me at great length that a network of banks controls the world, not governments. He listed several tie-ins that suggested that major events were related to the monetary decisions of banking institutions, though most of us did not know this.

Another man I came across, who later admitted that he had been in a motorcycle accident, told a coworker at that there was some kind of tax conspiracy here in our hometown and it had to do with the courts. People were being bilked out of millions of dollars.

When people have theories like these, and share them— I notice some commonalities. One is that they tend to go on for some time about them. The ideas were obviously formed in solitude, where they grew quite complex and elaborate. Another is that they always have lots of evidence— loads of it.

It is as if, at the end of hearing these monologues, no matter who we are, we have no choice but to agree that the theories are indeed fact.

Either there are a lot of sane people out there with false ideas or there are lots of schizophrenics— more than one might expect.

Down The Rabbit Hole

I have been trying to focus more on establishing dividing lines between reality and illusion in more recent posts. This especially pertains to the post I made about creating a duality between sensory and emotional realities.

Today, something strange happened, and I had a little bit of a freak out.

My wife's Google Photo Assistant assembled a video using only pictures of our cat Tobi from the last 2 years. Some pictures were close-ups, others from farther away. Some had other people in them. But all included Tobi. There was even a little musical piece accompanying the video, using synthetic bells and guitar sounds.

Apparently, the Google network was able to recognize our cat's face, and put together this media on its own, without us asking.

In other instances, I can explain away such things— ie, I might know how a system could do certain things.

But I find this hard to explain.

Even though I am less paranoid than some of my sane friends about privacy and similar issues in this digital age, I reached a point where I had to nod and agree that lines are being crossed.

It's interesting to consider the kinds of things that are possible now at a computer network can recognize faces and generate its own media. I will allow you to consider these things yourself.

I am tired now— maybe it's too much for a paranoid schizophrenic to take in.

Human Nature And Dignity

Having schizophrenia is, I admit, a disadvantage. It can present a challenge, or series of them. Part of the problem is that I actually may not be as able in certain situations as others. Another part is the stigma that is attached to the illness.

Disability is actually a very common condition in our modern world. There are many types of disabilities— some mental, some physical. All present difficulties to those who suffer. I am sure that most disabled people would like to transcend their condition(s), and to be regarded as valued people.

To be clear, in recent times, most of the people in my immediate circle of family, friends and coworkers have been very supportive of my condition. They have been more accepting and encouraging than I would have expected.

I am happy about this, and I do indeed hope that other disabled people get treated with respect and decency.

All people, after all, deserve dignity. For they are born, indeed they suffer, and indeed they die. No one escapes this fate. The insane suffer and die alongside the sane. I make a plea then that this be remembered, and that we treat one another well, regardless of other factors.

Fears

As a schizophrenic living alone on various forms of government assistance, you might think I had little to worry about. The checks came in every month, and everything was taken care of.

However, there were very real concerns.

One involved government shutdown. Whenever the Feds would start talking about the debt ceiling, and the government would shut down, there were suggestions that Social Security checks would not go out. And when that monthly check is basically all you get (and you are living month to month), that creates a real issue.

A second big fear was of assessments. Every few years, Social Security would request that the awards recipient undergo a new series of considerations, to ascertain whether or not they could continue receiving SSDI money. In other words, were they “sick enough” or “the right kind of sick” to get the monthly checks.

I would count the months until these assessments, worrying that I would be found to be too healthy to get help, and wondering if I was able, that being the case, to return to work.

Now that I am employed and earn my own income, I am much more confident about the money I receive. I am no longer at the financial edge, looking into oblivion. I even have a modest savings.

It is a great relief.

The Hunt for Scott Turner **Thomas Park**

Chapter 1

Detective Bunt Sidecull pulled up to his office in a long, brown 1993 Ford Fairmont. He tried to park smoothly in his usual spot-- on a hill affording him a view of Chinatown's bar district, and to his left his office-- but ended up rear-ending the car in front of him. It was a light rear-ender. . .

Nothing starts off a day on the wrong foot like an embarrassing accident, and Sidecull was forced to walk up to his office with people jeering and laughing at him about the rear-ender he had pulled.

Bunt had spent some extra time on his hair this morning. He had decided to use a new gel. The gel was supposed to condition his hair. Then it was supposed to come off with a rinse. But the gel had stuck in his hair, and he looked like an overweight Christopher Reeves before his accident.

The other tenants in his office-- a variety of businesses, including an insurance office, a real estate agent, some telemarketers, and so on had commented one and all as he passed by on his new hairdo. Bunt tried to brush their comments aside, but he could not seem to. They stuck.

Bunt finally reached his office on the third floor and shut and locked the door behind him. He threw his newspaper on a pile of papers in the corner-- a pile so tall that the oldest paper dated years back. He couldn't afford a secretary, and there were no pretty B-girls around anymore to volunteer their time.

He sat down at his desk. He looked at his desk. There was a clock, an empty letter-opener holder, and an old ball point pen. The pen was right where he had thrown it the previous Friday.

Bunt needed a case, and he would be lucky to get one in this city.

San Francisco was like California's carry-out box. You either lived in Los Angeles or you were stupid. You could make it in San Francisco if you had connections in Los Angeles, or worked in the industrial block, but if you were an average guy, you just got by.

On the other hand, Bunt was strangely fond of San Francisco. He had cool neighbors, and had even gotten sentimental about the place. He liked trading tips and coupons with his fellow apartment dwellers, and enjoyed looking at their wives and magazines. For a minute or two now and then, anyway.

Married men, he feared, could make the best detectives if he let them. Better than him, maybe.

Bunt passed an excruciatingly boring morning. There was no way to put words to how bored he felt. He ended up looking at the clock, the letter-opener holder, then the ballpoint pen over and over again. . . then at the door.

Finally, about noon, he got a phone call. A woman was on the line-- her name was Sean Gellarty. She said she had met a man-- some guy named Turner. Turner had taken her under his wing and promised to help her out, maybe to marry her. They had made plans for a wedding and right away Turner had disappeared-- she wanted Bunt to find him and to make sure the two of them finalized their marriage.

Bunt asked her where she had heard of his detective agency. She said from an old coupon she found at the mall.

The woman had sounded upset and Bunt thought she might be kind of stupid. Or naive, maybe. Why would a woman trust a man who had proposed to her until they had at least picked out a dress and a tuxedo? If Turner was like Bunt, he would have enjoyed talking about a wedding, but probably would have balked before getting married.

But the guy was rich, guessed Bunt, and must have looked pretty good. He probably had charmed her right into his car and starting making claims about all the ways he could help her.

He called Sean Gellarty back and took her case. He got to part about the money. He gave her an estimate-- \$5000. Ms. Gellarty asked him the big question-- could he find Turner? Could he promise to find him?

Bunt looked at the clock, the letter-opener, and the ball point pen. He looked out the window, and at the sky.

He promised her he would try.

Chapter 2

Bunt had a strategy. He had a friend in the police force. He could get a description of Turner and see if any similar cases had been reported, maybe under the "missing persons" heading.

Bunt called Gellarty and asked for her description of Turner. She said he was a medium tall man with blond hair, slender and in his late forties. He had no limp, no obvious scars, and two pale blue eyes.

Bunt would take it up with the police.

Gerald Duffy, Lt. 2nd Class, San Francisco Police, was Bunt's contact. They usually met at a Chinese place down the hill from Bunt's office. Then, Duffy would do his footwork and get a hold of Bunt.

Cops aren't supposed to help private detectives. There's a rigorous discipline concerning this kind of thing in the police force. Many case files are protected by password, and only certain ranks of officers are allowed to see them, and only for certain reasons. If the police found out about Bunt's thing with Duffy, they would probably suspend his badge-- or they might even kick him off the force.

Duffy told Sidecull one time he had been in the police office and had been looking up a case for him-- an old runaway case about some teenage kid who had taken off with some buddies and had left with his mother's purse and some other stuff with him. The Captain had spied him in the records room looking kind of nervous and had taken his badge for a day. Bunt repaid him that evening with a double serving of curly shrimp rice and many, many apologies for his troubles.

Bunt met Duffy at the restaurant about 8:30 PM. It was a busy night, and all kinds of interesting or drunk people were walking around who would forever remain anonymous. Sidecull pulled into a parking spot and roughly ran up and down the gears before putting on the brake. He had had a car roll once-- it had gotten about ten feet before it had hit a black BMW. That had cost him a few weeks' pay.

Bunt walked slowly into the restaurant. Duffy was there already, helping himself to some Mandarin Chicken-- the hot stuff. He asked the waiter for a glass of water and brought it to the table.

He asked Duffy how things were at the force. Duffy told Bunt someone had dropped off a homeless guy that morning, and they had spent all day looking for a good shelter for him. Lots of bigger stuff-- blue-collar crime, drug running, etc. was going on, but Duffy never got the drug cases, unless, it was just for a joint taken from some drifter.

Bunt told Duffy the private detective thing was going pretty well. He handed him a spoonful of rice to water down his chicken, and told him not to eat the peppers.

Bunt told him a woman named Gellarty was looking for a man named Turner-- some guy, medium height, blond, blue eyes, no visible scars-- who had approached her and seduced her. He had promised to marry her, but had run off right before their wedding. He grimaced. Could Duffy help him out with this?

Duffy looked a little taken aback. . . Turner. . . Turner. . . he seemed not to recognize the name. Then he knocked back his plate and said he'd join the hunt for this Turner. He would look for similar cases ASAP and call Bunt the next day with the results.

Bunt thanked him, feeling, for some reason, increasingly nervous. He didn't like this case somehow. He felt like he had really stumbled into this thing, and Turner had just pulled him in like a piece of metal to a magnet. Bunt stared at his foot. He just could not say no to this case. For that kind of money there was no turning back.

Bunt went home and cracked open a bottle of beer. It didn't help much. He began to reflect on why the case bothered him.

Turner was really a symbol of all that Bunt hated about California. Fast cars, relationships without sentiment, big buildings that just bounce your reflection right back off their mirrored exteriors.

Bunt had had a girlfriend once. She was a real free spirit-- a wanderer. Her name had been Rose. He had met her just out of college, and had fallen for her immediately, and, for some reason, she had fallen for him. Bunt supposed she had thought he was on the fast track, because he had a degree and was interviewing a lot at the time. Plus he had had short hair. Maybe she thought he was about to get a job somewhere else, and was going to move away. Because his apparent success had attracted her and for some reason she also decided that she had no need to commit to him. When he had asked her to marry him, she had said no and had left that very day.

Bunt's beer was empty. He didn't even remember finishing it. Good old Budweiser, he thought, somehow seeming to miss the spirit he was truly in.

Turner couldn't get away with it. You can't get on somebody's good side and then leave them

in the lurch. It's just not right.

Bunt looked in the mirror. It was cracked in the center, but he could see, though one half of his face was in shadow and the other in light, that he was looking OK. Though he could use a shave, and the gel in his hair had started to run. The expensive gel he had bought to make his hair look like a star's. Did Turner gel his hair? Probably, thought Bunt.

He wanted to call Gellarty.

He dialed her number. She answered right away. She had been thinking about Turner again and couldn't sleep. Bunt told her right away that Duffy had taken Turner's description to the police department and would let him know if he found any matches.

She said that was good.

There was a moment of silence.

Bunt pictured himself in the mirror.

He told Gellarty that she could pay him \$1000 up front, and the rest of the money when Turner was found. She said that was a good idea. He remembered Rose, and how she had gotten the wrong idea about him. About the fast track thing and all.

Bunt was glad the Chinese food and beer smells didn't carry across the phone line. He asked Gellarty if she would meet him the next day at a cafe at the top of the Chinatown Bar district. There were certain confusing details concerning the Turner affair that he wanted to ask her about, and he was hoping she could help him get a bead on the guy. She agreed to meet him there.

He hung up and thought about calling Rose. Then, he laughed. He didn't have her number. Tragic.

Bunt peeled off his sticky clothes, set his alarm clock, and went to sleep. He dreamt of Turner, as he pictured him-- in a car, on his feet, blond hair in the wind, always moving, never stopping to eat, piss, shit, just moving, moving, moving. And of himself in the cracked mirror-- the way the light on the right side made his gray hair look lighter.

Scott Krull was working out. He had a free pass to a local gymnasium, and liked to show up at around 5:30 AM, when all the working women got there. He had an expensive breathable suit and a sleek body with toned, powerful muscles.

He was working at the free weights. There were women around, including a sexy brunette just a few yards away doing leg lifts. She looked married. He lapsed into a blurry, perpetual rhythm and let her image slip away.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

I must keep running.

Six. Seven. Eight. Nine.

Past Smith, past Murphy, past Gellarty.

Ten. Eleven. Twelve.

I will live until the age of ninety.

And look just this way.

And always be free.

Thank God.

Bunt had a hard time waking up. He looked in the mirror-- this time almost all of his hair had a special glow to it. His few gray hairs stood out in the sunlight, and his whole head of hair was bathed in light.

He threw on some clothes, counted some bills into his wallet, put on his watch, and went back to the mirror. He was perspiring a bit, and couldn't seem to get his bearings.

He was nervous.

Bunt got in his car, and wound his way through the traffic. He kept getting distracted by peripheral things-- other cars, people, street signs. . . and had a hard time preventing himself from looking at them. Usually he was more focused.

He checked his hair in the car mirror. He was under a shadow, so it was back to looking its natural dark. The gray was just a series of flecks. The gel looked more natural today.

He got up and walked and had the strange sensation that someone was looking at his ass. Why would someone look at his ass? They probably weren't really looking, but he felt that way sometimes. It made his knees shake a little.

Gellarty must have been running late. Bunt took a table. Some gel leaked off of his hair onto the table, and he said to himself, Goddamn. He ordered a double espresso on ice.

Espresso can give a guy a certain kind of superpower. But it's a really dangerous kind of superpower. Like you could kick over five tables and make it to the restroom in a split second,

but you'd probably pee yourself or crack a urinal with your bare hands once you got there.

The cafe was sporting several modernist paintings. Mostly they were of strange red and turquoise spirals or people with giant egg heads and yarn for eyebrows. Bunt felt sorry for the artist who had made all that crap. They always charge \$200 per piece and never sell a thing.

He had looked at the egg-headed man painting 12 times when Gellarty finally showed up.

She was attractive. Bunt thought she looked like Rose for a second, but that scared him-- he choked out a hello. She said hello back.

Her hair was dark and long. Past the shoulders. Her forehead was smooth and white, and from her lips, slightly parted, emerged a quiet aspirating sound.

He wished he didn't have to talk business with this woman, but, then again, the artist of those paintings didn't want to have to charge \$200 for them either-- some things a person had to do to just to get by.

Duffy had been busy on a petty drug case, and the force was on his back, so he didn't have time to give me his report on Turner. Bunt told Gellarty he didn't have much to go on, but was hopeful, and ordered her a cup of coffee.

She didn't seem to want to drink the coffee, though she said thanks. Bunt's espresso was long finished.

He gave her a longer history of himself-- he had a college degree, had been a private detective for several years, and had cracked about 30 cases. He didn't mention Rose; he was afraid he might get upset.

She seemed somewhat interested, though she kept looking around at the paintings and such in the coffeehouse.

Bunt asked her if she liked Mr. Egghead, and she laughed and pointed her finger at him. The jukebox started playing "Spirits In The Material World" by the Police. Bunt thought more about the case and the description of Turner, and tried not to dwell on his early 90's bar life, of which the song reminded him.

He ordered another espresso and asked Gellarty to tell him about her history with Turner. She seemed to want to talk about it.

Gellarty told him this tall, blond handsome man had picked her up in a white 1995 Cadillac Sedan on her way home from the movies. He had seen she was walking, and asked her simply if she wanted to have a lift. Her parents had wanted her not to take rides with strangers, but this looked just like the kind of guy her parents would have wanted her to marry anyway, so she agreed.

On the way home, he told her to look around her. They had been driving through a commercial district. Turner said he knew the architect who had designed half of these buildings, and that one of them was where he worked.

He didn't mention which building.

Then Turner had asked her about herself, and she had said she was a movie fan who helped to manage a series of Laundromats. She had been a little ashamed of it all, but admitted with some reluctance that she was single, and had thought that this was better than the movie she had just seen.

Turner took that opportunity to ask her for her number, and to give her his business card.

She showed the card to Bunt. It said, Scott Turner, Accounting-- Forward Thinking Enterprises.

This had led to a series of dates. Each time Scott would call, and tell her he had plans, and explain in perfect detail the list of expensive restaurants and clubs where they would go. He would pick her up right on time, and spend scores of dollars every night on her food and entertainment.

He seemed like a perfect gentleman, and never even mentioned sex or tried to give her a goodnight kiss until about a month into the relationship.

One night, Scott took her to a Thai restaurant, her favorite kind. He bought her about 5 fruity drinks, and, calmly as ever, asked her if he could come home with her.

The details got hazy at this point, but Gellarty mentioned some adult contemporary cds he had brought with him, a ten thousand dollar engagement ring he had promised her, and his somewhat masculine insistence he accompany her into her bedroom. All things considered, she had agreed.

Though Scott seemed somewhat a mystery to her in many ways, he was a powerful and generous man who always got her exactly what she needed. She imagined having a new house and children who looked just like Scott except they would have a little dark on the edges of their hair from her, and she wound up wanting to marry him.

She was afraid to bring up her marriage idea. The parade of bars and restaurants continued, and she couldn't seem to broach the subject. They kept sleeping together, and by the time he had showered the next morning and put on his suit, she still couldn't seem to ask him about getting married.

After exactly one more month, on the anniversary of their first lovemaking, Scott proposed to her. Just from her phone calls, her parents already loved him, and she had come to rely on him. She had said yes. He had knelt before her in the beautiful modern private 3rd floor of a Thai

restaurant, and she had said yes.

That day was the last time she had seen Scott Turner.

He had simply disappeared. He wouldn't answer his pager and had never given her his phone number, telling her that would come later. She couldn't find "Forward Thinking Enterprises" in the phone book, though there were similar businesses like "Blue Horizon" and "Big Perpetual Tomorrow", and she succeeded only in annoying a bunch of innocent and anonymous businesspeople and making herself feel sadder and more resolute every minute..

In the industrial block where he said he worked, Gellarty had spent hours searching for Scott's business, but had not found it-- searching until the buildings looked familiar and the sun was going down and her legs had turned numb.

Gellarty told Bunt that she thought she was in love with Scott Turner, and asked Bunt if he could help her find him, and reestablish their relationship so she could go through with the wedding.

Bunt asked Gellarty again about the industrial block Turner had told her about. He said he would follow her lead and search it . He told her that his casework with the police was no big deal right now, but he would tell her if anything about Turner showed up.

Bunt looked down at his hands. One clasped the other firmly. He thought about Rose, and felt a deep inner sadness that was all too familiar. He took his leave of the cafe-- Gellarty stayed on, wanting to hang out for awhile.

Bunt had been very impressed by the story, and saw how Gellarty could have fallen for Turner. At the same time, he felt a profound anger for Turner for so brazenly using such a pretty girl, and then simply forging ahead. What motivated the man? Was it pride? Lust? Greed? He wanted to find out.

Bunt checked himself. It would be awhile before Duffy got his report on Turner ready, and he was stuck in San Francisco, with his nice neighbors, a dingy office, and lots of time to spend searching the industrial block.

He got into his beat-up old car and drove to the office.

Bunt sat around for awhile at his desk. He would investigate the industrial block tomorrow. "Forward Thinking Enterprises" might be on a certain floor or a building Gellarty had not seen, but then again, there may be no "Forward Thinking Enterprises".

Bunt looked at his desk again. He looked at the clock and the envelope opener, but couldn't quite make it to the ball-point pen.

Bunt was thinking about Turner. What Turners did he know? Ike Turner. Ted Turner. Who else? Did he have a wife like Ike? Did he beat his Tina? Was he a cable television mogul with a shiny new network? Turner seemed like a Ted Turner type, but would have been too obsessed with his anonymity to have a publicly accessible television show. Maybe Turner was a traveling man, never able to settle down. He had inherited his money-- or maybe stolen it.

Bunt made his tie do a backflip over his shoulder. Rose had handed him ten hundred dollar bills to last him until he solved the case. He could buy a new suit or a new pair of shoes, but he felt too depressed and somehow preoccupied at the same time to go shopping.

Although there were these shoes he had been looking at for awhile. Over at Turnabout's. Black, shiny shoes like his father had worn, with black tassels. Polished to perfection. They had been sitting behind Turnabout's dusty window for over a year. Should he buy them now?

Would Gellarty like the shoes? Rose would have. They made him look like he had made it in life somehow. . .

He thought about Gellarty and remembered their conversation. The way her breath aspirated between her teeth. . . Her long black hair. . . she was like Rose, only more, well-- maybe more West Coast Gothic. His espresso had made him jumpy, but she had seemed to calm him.

Until she started talking about Turner. The woman still loved Turner. That was like Tina still loving Ike. Was she his private dancer? She couldn't be Bunt's, then. A slight warm breeze carrying garlic and peppers blew in through a strangely obtrusive crack in the window.

He must try to find Turner. Turner would then do one of two things. He would either come back to Gellarty-- maybe marry her-- or he would refuse to return, and continue his mysterious, wealthy, low-profile existence.

The telephone rang. It was Duffy. He asked Bunt to meet him at the restaurant.

Bunt pulled into his spot at the Chinese restaurant. He went in and sat at a corner table. They always said in the old stories to sit at the corner table, with your back to the wall, so you can see everyone. No one can surprise you. Bunt wasn't running from any crooks, so he didn't have to do this. But he liked old writers like Thompson and McBain, and thought that their detective stories were compelling. He owned most of McBain's books; some were stained with hair gel from when he had leaned too close to them or sat in the heat and the gel had rolled off of his head onto the book.

McBain had been into police procedurals. His hero, Carella was a tall, handsome, sad-faced man who always wised his way through his cases. He worked at the Precinct, and his partners were of all types-- a Jewish detective named Meyer Meyer-- bald and feisty-- Cotton Hawes, a big, handsome redhead with a white streak in his hair where he had been knifed-- he wondered what it would have been like to work in Carella's Precinct.

Bunt ate his way through a carry-out box of beef fried rice until he had accidentally poked a hole through its greasy base. Comically, he started looking at fellow diners through the hole-- and saw Duffy.

Duffy and Bunt exchanged greetings. Then Duffy began giving Bunt the lowdown on Turner.

It turns out several women had complained about a medium height blond man starting relationships with them, then running away without breaking things off-- right before a planned marriage. Duffy had spoken with two of them-- there were five women-- and had been unsure as to the exact description of the man. One woman said he had a short beard. The other said he was clean-shaven. Both agreed with some certainty that the man was medium height and blond with no scars or defects, just like Turner.

The other three women had filed reports with the San Francisco Police concerning Turner. Each report matched fairly closely the original description of Turner. Duffy said the reports were customarily maintained for one year precisely in the "recent complaints" database, then relegated to the "old cases" database.

Duffy was a 2nd Lieutenant. He usually took on smaller cases. He was allowed access to the "old cases" database whenever he wanted. He often found good leads there, including a case he had cracked concerning a police impersonator back in 1998 who had a previous record in Los Angeles. He had to get through the chief to get access to the "recent complaints" database. Usually captains and other high-ranking officials only were allowed access to these files.

The force kept a thorough database. Each report included, among other information:

1. The complainant's name
2. Their gender
3. Their height and weight
4. Other physically determining factors: eye color, scars, marks, etc.
5. Their address
6. Their phone number
7. Their employer's address
8. Their employer's number
9. Their marital status
10. Their complaint

The tenth entry allowed for multiple complaints concerning the same case, and often involved several phone conversations or interviews.

The resulting database was very large and very helpful.

The current complaints looked just like the old complaints. This was true back to the fifties-- the records department had re-entered the data from old cases (including the police

impersonator) back to 1953.

It was actually to the force's credit that only certain individuals could gain access to the newer files. Duffy felt bad about having to go behind his captain's back, but he was able to distract the captain by asking for his help when an old drunk in a khaki jacket burst into the front door and claimed he had just solved a fifty year old case. Duffy asked for the captain's help, and slipped away during the confusion. He ran a quick scan of cases whose objects fitted Turner's description, and sent the files to a printer in the main room.

Duffy had just managed to flip the database back to home when the drunk, immobilized and handcuffed, was brought to the second floor.

Bunt didn't know whether to thank Duffy or run off with the files. He was quite excited-- if he could talk to the women who had known Turner, or, at least, if he could find a pattern in the way Turner moved, he might be able to help Gellarty. He really wanted to help Gellarty.

Well, Duffy had been a big help, yet again. He couldn't have a better friend in the force. He had been through situations with Duffy that would have made a Thompson or a McBain run for their typewriters, and all he ever paid him with was Chinese food.

Bunt knew that Duffy had been wanting to take his wife for a trip to Los Vegas for a family vacation, but he didn't know if he could afford it. Bunt reached into his pocket and took out three hundred dollar bills and handed them to Duffy. Duffy looked a little surprised, but only put up a short fight. He took the money and said thanks from himself and his wife.

Bunt left the restaurant. He wanted to phone Gellarty, but decided to search the industrial plaza first. He was so anxious, he felt he was halfway there-- halfway to finding Turner.

Chapter 3

Veal Hamm was on her way to the bank. She had just gotten paid, and had her weekly \$200 in her purse. The road rose ahead of her. . . she had about 1/2 mile left to walk. She was sweating daintily but uncomfortably, and was beginning to feel a little spacey, as she often did when she walked long distances.

Veal worked at a Hallmark plant. She helped to write the inscriptions on Hallmark cards, and had gotten pretty good at it. She could write a card for any occasion, and sometimes her girlfriends asked her to pen a line or two for them when they were making homemade cards for holidays.

Hallmark was really a place for Veal to pay her dues. She had graduated from High School and gone to Community College for 2 years, but had not earned a bachelor's degree. She had spent several years looking for good work, and had worked assembling plastic parts at a factory, selling women's shoes, and selling escalators to shopping malls before she had finally found Hallmark and decided to stick with it.

Veal tried very hard at Hallmark. Some people think those inscriptions are easy to invent, and some of her colleagues seemed to have an easy time of it. Veal took a long time with her inscriptions. If the card was supposed to be humorous, she made sure it was funny. If it was religious, she thought about going to church and really tried to capture the mood. You couldn't really say she was selling out, because she tried so hard to do what she did well.

Veal had had boyfriends. Her last boyfriend, George, had met her at a Valentine's Day dance at the gym she used to go to. He had said something funny to her-- that with her legs looking like that, he wondered if he might take a walk with her. She had told George that if her father was younger, she'd marry him, but George looked pretty much good enough. They had gotten along well, and had become what her girlfriends called "The Sweetest Couple." He had broken up with her when his mother had caught leukemia. He had to go to Washington to stay with her at a hospital. Veal had tried to comfort George and persuade him to stay or to let her come with him. For some reason, all of her appeals had fallen short.

To this day she was sad about losing George, and had a hard, bittersweet time writing Valentine's Day cards. She felt like she had nothing much to offer in that department.

She was surprised and a little frightened when a 1995 Cadillac Sedan pulled up beside her on the road. She had seen cars like this before, but was amazed to actually be close to one. It was very long, and very white and very shiny.

A medium height blonde man, very handsome, got out of the car. She thought he looked a lot like that actor Bill Holden with his nice, combed hair, youthful face, thin but powerful physique and perfect teeth. The man walked up to her and said his name was Scott Turner. He asked her if he needed a ride. Veal hesitated for a moment, somehow wishing he had never pulled over. She looked around her-- at the shops, the cars, and the 1/2 mile ahead of her, and then at him. When she looked at him the second time she tried but could not say no.

Veal got in Scott's car, and Scott pulled into the traffic, slowly accelerating to the 45-mph speed limit.

Bunt pulled into the industrial plaza. Turner's business had to be in one of four blocks, according to Gellarty. He wanted to find "Forward Thinking Enterprises"-- really to find it-- and to nail Turner. If it was around here, he would either find him at work or someone there would have heard of him.

He couldn't much go on Gellarty's hints-- she had given him some general ideas, but had been so upset when she searched that she didn't remember enough to help him considerably.

Bunt suddenly wished Gellarty was with him. She was a pretty woman, and he was beginning to think about her more and more. Turner had been smart-- he had a good eye. The man would not stop for anything, and Gellarty hadn't really tried to stop him, either.

Turner decided to round each of the four blocks, walking from the Northeast corner South, then West, then North, then East again, then to the next Northern block. He would start with the most Southern industrial plaza block.

The industrial plaza was really a testament to Reaganomics and rapidly-built, impressive architecture. Bunt was from San Francisco, but this was more like Los Angeles-- people might even have commuted here from Los Angeles. You could disappear in one of these office buildings and emerge a new man-- with a new fortune.

Bunt walked into his first building. The lobby was small but intimidating-- air-conditioned, with dark wooden walls and a few pieces of futuristic art-- a painting with gray, black and pink paint lines, thrown there, apparently, by the artist, a perfect cube of glass on a pedestal and a weird flower vase with artificial flowers that really stuck out because they were so fake.

Bunt found the elevator. He couldn't go up-- he saw this-- because a card or pass of some sort was required. A newcomer to the building could only pace circles in the lobby unless they had an elevator pass.

He looked at the list of businesses:

Graystone Monuments
Desert Air
Has Success Eluded You, Ltd.
New For You, Inc.
Serendipity
Earthquake! Insurance

There was no "Forward Thinking Enterprises", per se. Some of the businesses resembled "Forward Thinking Enterprises" to a degree, but none were a close enough a match to be the same business.

Bunt sighed and slumped his shoulders. The sweat that had begun to pool under his arms squished nastily. He already felt a little burned out, like a kid after walking 3 miles for dessert and eating several ice cream cones too fast. But he would not give up.

After entering the lobbies of about 12 industrial buildings, Bunt had finally abandoned his quest-- without finding a single lead. He had seen Cadillacs drive by, but not the white 1995 sedan he was looking for.

He had found dozens of businesses-- "Flowers By Mail", "Dial-A-Christ", "Driveways For You", "Your Valhalla", "Labyrintspel", "Follow The Yarn", "Minnow Tarring", "Dark Forest", "Lost At Sea", and others. None had closely resembled "Forward Thinking Enterprises". He had only succeeded in humiliating himself before a dozen or so receptionists.

He knew now how Gellarty had felt after she had spent all day running around the plaza in her high heels-- completely defeated and quite blank with fatigue.

Bunt got back in his car. He felt like hanging a flag from his antennae like hearses sometimes do, but was certainly too tired to buy one.

Chapter 4

Scott Krull and Veal Hamm sat down for a nice late lunch in the beautiful, modern, air conditioned restaurant, Plus et Plus. Veal had never had French food, but had always wanted to try it. Being here was like the first time she had seen a painting by Monet-- everything was plush and elegant, and people talked softly so you could hear their silverware tinkling while they ate.

Scott unfolded a napkin and put it in her lap, and proceeded to tell her about the silverware. One fork, he explained, was for salad, another for the entree. There was a special spoon for dessert.

Veal wanted to made a card for Scott telling him he was like a special spoon for dessert.

He was a handsome man. His forehead was powerful and square, and his nose sharp and somewhat Roman. His thin-lipped mouth revealed two rows of absolutely perfect teeth. Even as he ate, his teeth remained perfect and clean, as though he had somehow stopped time to brush them and then started time again without anyone noticing.

He rarely sneezed, and when he did, it was into a silk handkerchief.

Scott said Veal had a nice outfit on, and was very pretty. He then enthralled her with a series of oratories, giving her a chance now and then to say wow or amazing.

Scott told Veal that the new money printed at the treasury had required certain forms of new technology to produce. Only certain people understood this technology, but the result was that a fine weave in the bills prevented counterfeiting. The Presidents' heads had been enlarged in order to honor them-- basically a patriotic maneuver.

Scott talked about how most of history was irrelevant except for certain things we had learned lessons from-- about the expertise of General Sherman and his drive to the sea, the genius of Henry Ford, the way America had beaten the Soviet Union in the space race and claimed the moon, and the way Germany should have taken more supplies when they invaded Russia.

Scott ate the way he talked-- smoothly. He put some food on his spoon, seeming to scoop it rather than fork it-- and slid it between his perfect teeth. Veal felt like she was feeding him, she got so much out of watching him eat. She also tried to scoop up food with her fork, and had to resort to circumspectly stabbing it as usual.

Scott had several courses and finished each and every one entirely. He drank three glasses on white wine and left behind nary a drop nor a lip print. He kept talking and Veal kept listening, and he promised her an excellent dessert.

Scott whispered to the waiter, and a few minutes later he brought Veal a syrup-coated peach with a chocolate wafer rolled into a stick. Veal stared at the dessert with amazement. She had never had such a fine treat! He was treating her like a Rockefeller.

Scott watched her with his cool blue eyes as she nibbled on the chocolate wafer, and then spooned the peach to her bite after bite, cleanly spooning the peach onto his silverware and snapping the thin skin with a turn of the wrist.

In ten minutes she had finished what would have cost her about 3 days pay in dessert, and she thought she was falling in love.

While Bunt massaged his feet, trying to recover from his search, Scott Krull was conquering another victim. Of course, few knew-- the Veal Hamm affair was private so far. Bunt had no bead on Turner-- he wanted one, but had no way of knowing about Veal.

This case was like a baseball game with no hits past infield. Disturbingly anti-climactic.

Bunt thought it was time to look into Duffy's reports. The cops were really his best friend so far. He had to get a handle on this case.

He called the first woman who Duffy had talked to.

The first woman, Catty Fields, said Turner had approached her unexpectedly. He had asked her some questions, and tried to get her phone number. Turner showed her no I.D. other than his business card-- "Forward Thinking Enterprises", just like he did to Gellarty. She was interested in pursuing something with Turner, mainly because he seemed to be rich, and suggested to her that he would be getting richer.

Catty said she wouldn't feel the same about a Turner without a beard. He would look so much smoother and more boyish.

Bunt thought Catty seemed nice. He asked her about Turner's car.

She said it was a big white sedan that stuck out pretty much everywhere it was so shiny. Bunt asked her if it was a Cadillac-- she said that yes, it was.

Out of the blue, Catty asked Bunt for his phone number.

Police complainants, especially complainants who had had problems with men, rarely asked cops or detectives out. It was far out, that idea. Like expecting to find a parking spot at Neiman

Marcus in L.A. , it just didn't happen that often.

Bunt apologized as gracefully as possible, and explained that his car didn't work well enough for him to date her because there was a crack in the oil pan that didn't allow him to drive up and down steep hills. He told Catty he knew she lived in Serendipity Harbor, but he wouldn't be able to make it there without a better car.

Catty said Bunt was one honest detective, but he would never solve this case.

Turner was too smooth. He was too relentless. He had wooed her quite convincingly, and had proposed to her within two months. Then, he had left-- without a trace. This guy was too good at what he did to be caught-- but she did offer him one bit of advice.

Try cross-dressing and walking along a major San Francisco street.

To Bunt Turner was starting to seem like an anomaly of sorts-- like a bottle of wine at a basketball game, that turned out also to be incredibly cheap.

Bunt called the second woman who Duffy had talked to.

The second woman was named Wendy Jett.

Bunt asked Wendy if what she knew about Scott Turner.

She said he looked just like the description in the complaint she had filed.

He asked her if he had proposed to her.

She said that was ancient history. He had come and gone, and she'd never see him again. She knew she wouldn't.

Bunt felt frustrated. He gazed out of his window at the clear blue sky, for a moment at a loss.

He asked her if there was anything she hadn't told the police.

She said she couldn't remember, and she didn't want to try.

Bunt didn't harass Wendy any further. It clearly would have been in vain. He wondered if Scott Turner and Wendy weren't related somehow. He just couldn't get a thing she said to lead anywhere.

Bunt called the third woman. He didn't want to give up, no matter how frustrated he got.

The third woman's name was Phoebe Hack. She lived in an apartment out by the Pacific. Apparently Turner had approached her during a work luncheon. She was paying her bill, and he

said hello and gave her his business card. He had taken her out on about 10 dates, all to nice, expensive restaurants, and then had proposed to her. He had then disappeared. She said that in all her memory he had been the closest she had met to being a perfect man, and life was boring and empty without him.

She had no other helpful details to relate.

Bunt called the fourth woman. The phone rang 6 times, and then she finally picked up. Her name was Helen West. She said that Turner was such a smooth guy he had made her want to just float away with him to some far away place. She said he was clean shaven, pale skinned, and blond haired. He always wore light- or white- colored suits with pastel ties. He seemed to know about everything-- art, history, cars, culture-- but he really loved to talk with her about business. He had all kinds of ideas about streamlining San Francisco's industrial district and making it into a kind of residential and corporate mixture, where people would live above their employers and just take an elevator or walk a few blocks to their jobs, for example. She said he was a kind of clean-shaven version of Roark, Ayn Rand's leading man in The Fountainhead.

When Bunt was finished talking to Helen West, he felt that he knew Turner a little better. He was a visionary type-- he had dreams about making the future more convenient. He wanted people to be able to go about their lives more easily-- as if in some sort of perfect flow motion.

Bunt called the fifth woman. She didn't answer.

He lay down on his couch and took a nap-- he had had a tiring day.

Bunt had a dream, the kind of dream you can't remember when you wake up. He was playing football in a crowded stadium. The cheerleaders looked like normal women you could meet anywhere, and one of them was Gellarty. The referee blew a whistle, and Bunt looked up-- it was Rose. Rose started running towards the sideline. A thin, wiry football player suddenly knocked her on her feet and ran towards the end zone while the crowd cheered boisterously-- louder and louder. He went up to Rose to see if she was all right. She was dead-- her neck was broken, and her forehead and face tilted forward as though they had tried to fly off of her body.

The telephone woke Bunt up. He felt disturbed, but could not remember why. It was one of Turner's victims-- woman number five. Apparently, the message he had left on her machine had convinced her to call.

The woman's name was Katie Smith. She said Turner had picked up about 2 AM one night on her way home from a dance club. She had been very tired, and he seemed to psychically sense this. She said he was always giving her what she wanted, and just when she needed it.

Smith said it was like having your id become a genie, dating Turner. If you were hungry, he would almost always call, and take you out to a restaurant-- and a nice one, too. If you were bored, he would take you out dancing. He even bought her ecstasy once, which gave her a big

thrill. She asked Bunt not to bust him for it, because she didn't think he was involved with drugs in any major way.

Katie Smith seemed like an intelligent woman, and, once again, Bunt could see how Turner might have appealed to her. Bunt thought about Rose, and all the ways her genie-like attributes could have helped him live a more pleasurable life. But she had broken off their engagement-- just when things seemed to be getting good. Probably to go find someone like Turner to sleep with.

Bunt asked Smith a series of questions. He was especially interested in Turner's claim-- the one Gellarty had told Bunt about-- that Turner had worked at "Forward Thinking Enterprises", which, he had claimed, was in a particular industrial plaza in San Francisco-- probably the one he had searched.

Smith had a lead for Bunt. She said that "Forward Thinking Enterprises" was now called "Labyrintspel". Bunt's hair almost stood on end, he was so surprised and pleased. He remembered seeing "Labyrintspel"-- it was in one of the buildings he had investigated at the office park.

Bunt asked Smith if she knew anything else that might help him find Turner. She said Turner claimed to have a degree in history and had studied from modern days all the way back to Ancient Greece. She said he had talked about ancient Roman and Etruscan apartments and how similar they were to luxury apartments nowadays, only better because you had a huge entryway with a pool and you could walk to the market. Turner had said everything was convenient about apartment life back then. Smith said Turner was always talking about business and lifestyle and things like that.

Bunt asked her if she knew where Turner had studied, and she said he wouldn't say. He had told her life was his classroom. He must have studied somewhere that had a good history program, thought Bunt, because you don't just dredge up details like that 15 years after graduation unless you are well-taught.

Smith went on to list some inventions Turner liked to talk about, like the first American rocket, and the superhighway, and the Japanese high speed train, and so on. She shifted gears suddenly and discussed Japanese big business and the structure of power there and how that was a template, according to Turner, that America ought to apply to its businesses.

Bunt felt like he was listening to a very nice, very long-winded college professor, who didn't know he had to take a crap. He knew a little more about "Forward Thinking Enterprises" now (or "Labyrintspel"), and he was trying to think of a way to get Smith to stop talking about Turner's ideas. She just kept going on and on and Bunt was losing track of it all. He was pretty sure history lessons wouldn't help Bunt find Turner.

Finally Bunt managed to cut in. He said, somewhat awkwardly, that he had to go close his window because it was raining, and told Smith thanks and he would call her back if he needed

anything.

It actually was raining in San Francisco, so Bunt wasn't too upset about using that excuse to get off the phone with Smith.

Bunt went in the bathroom to take a leak. A sudden bolt of lightning hit close enough outside to make everything, including Bunt's reflection, look harsh and white. It was like a cop light had suddenly lit up the inside of his car from five feet away. Bunt zipped up his pants and got an umbrella.

Bunt said hello to the receptionist at Labyrintspel's building. She asked him if anyone expected him there. He said no, but he had an urgent matter to discuss with several employees. The receptionist said that no one was allowed to go to the floor Labyrintspel was on unless they were expected.

Bunt said, how could they expect him when they hadn't met him yet, and he wasn't buying anything, anyway?

The receptionist said that was just not the policy. She looked a little sorry for him, but wouldn't buzz him up.

A lot of people thought Bunt wasn't the kind of guy who could succeed at anything. His friends in college always said Bunt was starting things and never finishing them. But he had graduated from college, and he had made love to Rose, and he had solved over thirty cases.

Bunt walked up to the elevator, trying to get find some opening that would let him get up to Turner's old employer. The elevator didn't open when he pressed "4". He looked more closely at the elevator controls-- and saw that a pass was required to open the doors.

Bunt looked at the space between the two elevator doors. He wanted to pry the doors open and force his way into the elevator. If he did, he paused, thinking-- the elevator might not be on his floor, so he might just fall down into the basement and break his leg.

Bunt went back to the receptionist's desk. He looked up at her. She was on the telephone, talking about someone's meeting. There was a pass right in front of him on the table. She was hardly looking at Bunt while she was on the phone. She could have even been talking to one of Turner's fellow employees. All he had to do was nab the pass, and he could be where the person on the other end of the line was.

Just then, the receptionist looked at him. She looked annoyed. She finished her phone call, and asked Bunt how she could help him-- obviously trying to sound just the way she did when she first spoke with him.

He said he needed a pass for the elevator.

The receptionist said only those who had already been hired by the landlord or by one of the building's businesses could have an elevator pass.

Bunt asked if he could apply for a pass.

She said, you could apply, actually, by getting a job at one of the offices in the building.

Bunt asked if there were any openings she knew about.

She said she was pretty sure that none of the other 11 businesses were hiring, and that Labyrintspel never told her, because they hired through some professional placement agency in Los Angeles.

She said that the landlord did have one job opening that he could apply for.

A security guard.

Bunt thought he could do that kind of work. If Duffy could help find Turner, then Bunt could question a few businesspeople now and then about what they were doing. He even had practiced a tough look that had worked in several previous cases.

He took an application and filled it out right at the desk, while the receptionist looked on, seeming somewhat taken aback.

Bunt went home. He called Gellarty. He wasted no time telling her that he was investigating a potential job Turner once had had, and thought he might meet an associate of his there. He said it would take a week or so to really make any progress.

Gellarty said she had had a dream where she had been with Scott again, but, when she woke up, he was, of course, not there. Only his card in her wallet.

Bunt asked her if he had had any associates. She said he hadn't told her about any. Past girlfriends or wives? Again, she did not know. She was starting to sound a little upset.

Bunt wanted to ask her if she had had many previous boyfriends. She was beautiful-- like Rose only West Coast Gothic.

Bunt told Gellarty not to go near the industrial plaza and to avoid anything that reminded her of Turner.

Bunt said he would find Turner. He really thought he would.

Bunt called the office building where Labyrintspel was located the next morning. The

receptionist didn't remember him at first. He reminded her of the general thread of their conversation, and she said to call back at noon.

Bunt was having bad spell. He really wanted to take the bull by its horns, but couldn't seem to find the bull. He went into the bathroom. He looked in the mirror.

His eyes looked red. It's funny how, when you really want something, it doesn't matter how much sleep you get-- or don't get.

Bunt had once had a case that he rarely spoke of. An internal affairs officer had been busting cops right and left for taking bribes and consorting with prostitutes. One of the cops that had gotten busted said he thought the IA officer was up to something. Bunt was reminded of a movie just like that one starring Richard Gere.

It turns out that the job required Bunt to go on stakeout. He had spent two nights sleepless in his car before he finally saw the IA officer leave his home at a strange hour.

The officer had taken him for a wild trip down highways, alleys, main streets, and, even, through parking lots.

It had turned out that the IA man had just been going for a ride.

Bunt had wanted to bust him so badly that he had consumed 11 cups of 7-11 coffee, larges, in two nights. He didn't even feel it until the day after the chase, when, suddenly, he had become aware of a buzzing in his head, and a very powerful medicated feeling. He had collapsed on his couch and slept for 20 hours.

The IA case was one he never solved, and he often criticized himself when he thought about it. It was one of his few failures in the detective business. Somehow the IA cop had been better than Bunt.

Maybe all IA cops were.

Bunt thought anxiously about the security guard job, and felt, indeed, that his cover was good, and that he had a good chance to track down Turner at Labyrintspel. He just had to wait until noon.

Bunt looked at his sink. There was a comb, a toothpaste, and a toothbrush. He looked at the comb, the toothpaste, and the toothbrush. Over and over again.

Bunt called the office building again. The receptionist said he should come in around 1 PM for an interview-- with Will Peters, the building manager. Bunt asked the receptionist if he would be getting access to the whole building for his patrols. She said-- only if Mr. Peters took him on as a security guard.

Bunt was wishing he had bought those black shoes like the ones his father used to wear. He had a pair of loafers that were semi-formal, and a white shirt that barely fit (it was really a little too tight.) He put them on.

Bunt felt like he was going to his first job interview ever. When he was fourteen, he had worked as a caddy at a golf course near where his parents lived.

Bunt had been sweating heavily, just like he was now, and also seemed to have suffered from some form of short term memory loss. He had told the golf course manager that he didn't go to school because in the heat of the moment he thought the man would want him to have more time available to work. He also had called him "Chief". For Perry at the Daily Planet, "Chief" was too formal. For a golf course manager in the 1980's, it was too casual.

He had gotten the job anyway, and spent most of the summer following golfers around and looking over the rolling hills at the horizon. It was a pretty posh place with many nice views for people who took the time to let their eyes wander. And lots of time to kill.

Bunt showed up at the office building thirty minutes early. He asked the receptionist if Mr. Peters was ready for him. She said he would have to wait.

Bunt sat down in a lobby chair, and looked for something to read. All they had were old U.S. News and World Reports, and one People magazine. Bunt picked up the People. He didn't think he would have been able to remember any of the news he would have been reading at that time. He found himself looking at a picture of Linda Evans, who was planning to disown one of her children. She looked very calm and very pretty. He felt like his stress was somehow going to make her forehead collapse with its intensity-- but she kept looking at the camera, apparently quite at peace.

The buzzer sounded at the receptionist's desk, and the receptionist asked Bunt to go past her desk, down 3 halls, left, then right, then right again, to Mr. Peters' office.

Bunt was not an idiot. He had solved many cases in his day. But he was feeling jittery. He took two left turns, and realized his mistake when he ended up at a locked building exit. He tried to retrace his steps, and finally found Mr. Peters' office-- which was behind a metal door sporting a wooden plate with his name on it. Bunt hoped he would get the job, because he felt closer to getting into Labyrintspel every minute.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt to have a seat. The chair was too far away from the desk for Bunt, but he was afraid to move it closer. If he had looked straight ahead, Bunt would have been looking at the wall. He had to crane his neck to look at Mr. Peters, and this made his head shake. Bunt wondered if Mr. Peters could tell his head was shaking.

Bunt said he was glad to meet Mr. Peters. He looked his potential employer hopefully in the eyes, and as he finished his sentence, he experienced a shudder of tension that seemed to erupt

from his spine and up his neck; it caused his head to tremble more violently.

Mr. Peters said hello somewhat briskly. He looked down at Bunt's application. He held his brown suit sleeve firmly along the edge of his desk, and, at his wrist, Bunt counted two buttons, and was about to count "three" to himself when his nerves made him stop.

Mr. Peters said that he saw that Bunt had a college degree.

Bunt said that he had an M.A..

Mr. Peters said that security guards didn't need to have college degrees, and, in fact, this tended to make them overqualified.

Bunt tensed his forehead. He resisted the urge to rub it in order to calm it. Why would a college degree prevent someone from getting a job? A Masters Degree could really only help someone in terms of literacy and communication skills. Some employers, concluded Bunt, apparently look poorly on many years of extended study of several score books from the West, the East, the Mid-East, and darned near everywhere, and 50 plus papers written each to a degree of complexity suitable to convince a T.A. that the Professor would have agreed with his or her giving you something between a C-plus to an A-plus.

Bunt wondered if he should apologize for having a college degree. Before he could say anything, Mr. Peters said that he could see that Bunt had been involved with detective work.

Mr. Peters asked, without warning, what had made him quit?

Bunt was about to say that he wasn't making enough money as a detective, but he could almost picture a golf ball flying past the window, and him saying something like that he didn't go to school, no. Instead, Bunt explained he had passed his detective business on to someone else who wanted to do that kind of thing-- and again looked Mr. Peters in the eyes.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt if he had had any work since quitting as a detective. Bunt said he had been pursuing a relationship with a woman, and had reached a point where to get past dating he would have to get a career.

Mr. Peters said that he saw that Bunt had a personal reference. He asked if he could call Officer Duffy.

Bunt felt a flash of panic. If Mr. Peters called Duffy, Duffy might tell Peters that Bunt was still a detective. He didn't want to seem to still be doing detective work. Worse, he might tell Peters his real name-- and Bunt hadn't warned Duffy not to.

Bunt said that he could always do that, but that the San Francisco Police were very busy, and he might have a hard time getting through. He said Officer Duffy was a friend of his from way back who had helped him with some of his cases by advising him as to the legality of his

investigations.

Mr. Peters looked concerned. So, he said-- this woman you are seeing wants you to get a job so you can get engaged? Would you have pursued a job otherwise?

Bunt said that the nature of their relationship had really inspired him to get work. He wanted to outdo her previous boyfriend, who had been very successful. Bunt said hastily that he was not, however, by nature a lazy man, and had solved many cases.

Mr. Peters said it was kind of a strange thing for a man to get a job just to get on good terms with a woman. He looked at him for a moment as though he did not believe him, and then nodded slightly, and said, then again, it wasn't the strangest thing he had ever heard.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt why he had applied for a job at this particular building.

Bunt said that his girlfriend had always wanted him to get a job in Los Angeles, and that this Industrial Plaza was the closest thing. He had stopped by most of the buildings in the plaza, and the receptionist here was the only one who seemed to be able to help him.

Mr. Peters smiled thinly, and said, she's a nice woman, isn't she.

Bunt said she seemed very loyal.

Mr. Peters seemed about to say something conclusive, but then looked pensive. He asked Bunt why he had wanted to talk to the people at Labyrintspel.

Bunt said, somewhat shaken, that he had wanted to apply for a job there, but didn't realize they only hired out of Los Angeles. Bunt said he would have preferred to work as a security guard, and that the name "Labyrintspel" was known to him from a missing person's case he had worked on. He had just wanted to give them a try.

Mr. Peters said that there was no way he could obtain a security pass unless he was employed by one of the businesses in the office building, or by Mr. Peters himself.

Bunt felt a burst of joy. Mr. Peters seemed to be saying that Bunt would soon be one of those employees.

A cloud outside the office window moved past the sun, and the room filled with sunlight for a moment. Bunt's hand, on the edge of his chair, was lit up white, as though bleached by the sun. Then a cloud covered the sun once again.

Mr. Peters thanked Bunt for coming to the interview, and said he would think about his application. He said he would call Bunt as soon as he had made a decision.

Bunt tried not to show his frustration. He almost forgot to shake Peters' hand before leaving,

but he thought about chasing golf balls, and then about what his father would have said, and he walked up to Mr. Peters and shook his hand.

Please do give a call, said Bunt.

He left Mr. Peters' office.

Bunt walked past the receptionist as if in a daze. He didn't know if he should be able to remember her name, and just said goodbye and thanks without checking his pace. The receptionist said something polite in a cool monotone. Bunt passed the sign that said, "4B Labyrintspel".

This was crucially important, getting this job.

Suddenly time seemed to freeze, and Bunt felt himself at a sort of a combination déjà vu and a crux-- he had been in this spot before, where circumstances could determine whether he was to be an insider or an outsider in society. His SAT tests, and the first few bubbles he had woodenly filled out, in a daze as to whether he could finish in time. His college interview, and the fruity, nervous feeling he had had about his entrance essay. The first time he had asked Rose for a date, and had seemed to be in a whirling mental and emotional confusion, not knowing whether to predict victory or defeat.

He thought about his first case, and how this woman's husband had been trying to claim that their pre-nuptial agreement had been lost-- it had been so easy, then-- just a few phone calls, and a quick search for a copy of the papers. He remembered the IA case, and the two nights of sleeplessness, and 11 cups of coffee, and the huge, needless, chase. He thought about his crummy desk at the office-- his clock, his envelope holder, and his pen.

He thought, finally, of Gellarty, and her distant gaze, as though she had lost something and thought she would find it somewhere far away.

Bunt went back to the receptionist's desk-- his somewhat portly shadow growing longer as he got closer to her.

He asked her name.

She said her name was Mrs. Fram. He said his name was Bunt Smith, and that he was glad to meet her. He said, simply, that he hoped to see her again soon. Mrs. Fram said, yes, maybe-- and good luck.

Bunt paused for a moment, on the balls of his feet, and left the office building.

Bunt called Gellarty. She took a long time to answer. She said she had been watching a

television show, and the volume had been turned up too high.

Bunt was somewhat befuddled. He was closer now to finding Turner's trail, but everything now depended on another man-- Mr. Peters.

He told Gellarty that his lead looked a little sketchy now, but that someone might be helping him out.

She paused for a moment, not seeming very interested.

Bunt said he thought he knew where Turner used to work, and he was going to try to ask some people there if they knew him.

Gellarty said good luck-- and that he better try his best, because only Turner and she knew Turner, and he would have to be pretty good to catch that smoothie.

Bunt felt a little depressed, but thanked her, and said he would keep her informed about the Turner case. He hung up the phone.

He had to stay off the phone now in order to wait for Mr. Peters to call.

Mr. Peters didn't call that day, and he didn't call the next day, either. When Bunt tried to reach him by calling the building, he wasn't available. Bunt had asked the receptionist if she knew anything about Mr. Peters' decision, but she said that Mr. Peters was very quiet about his hiring and firing practices, and he never told anyone anything they did not need to know.

How could Bunt investigate the Labyrintspel people if he couldn't even get into their office? He didn't really want to be a security guard for its own sake-- just to find Turner for Gellarty. He didn't relish the idea of standing around all day asking random people who probably wouldn't steal their neighbor's paper if they had a pass for a particular part of a building.

If Gellarty had seen him, she probably would have said that he was slacking, and didn't care about the case. But Bunt had been very anxious about the job-- it was his best lead yet. The first day, in particular, he had been very tense, and had even gone to the office late that evening, where he sat with his silent phone and looked at his clock, his letter opener, and his ballpoint pen.

The second day he lost a little of his intensity, and by the third day, he was having trouble staying focused on his job opportunity. There was no straight path to Turner, it seemed. Probably someone knew him at Labyrintspel, but he had to wait for Mr. Peters, and had really no way of making progress without getting hired.

Bunt had no good options. Really, he was forced to remain slack. He felt physically comfortable, with a cup of coffee or a soda nearby at all times, in his air-conditioned apartment. But he couldn't escape the eerie sensation that people would judge him to be making no progress

of any kind, and would simply have deemed him lazy.

They just don't get my situation, thought Bunt, these imaginary people.

Bunt called Katie Smith late the second night. He thought he might like to hear more about Turner and his ideas. This was a little like flipping on the television to watch the Olympics-- there were all of these great performers jumping high hurdles and running 100 yard sprints in 6 seconds or so, and Bunt was just sitting there, watching, in his trousers and a tank top.

Ms. Smith got to talking immediately, and didn't stop for a long, long time. She said Turner had told her about the early Mid-Easterners, and how their mastabas, structures of stone, had looked like giant stairsteps from every angle, and how the Egyptians had changed that design, making it larger and smoother, so that the pyramids looked utterly smooth and, well, pyramidal, from far away. All of this was to praise the sun and to make sure that their pharaohs were prepared to be successful in the afterlife. Turner had said that most of them probably were. Turner had thought that the Egyptians were way ahead of their time, with better technology than most civilizations, and great ideas about how to immortalize their pharaohs. Turner's favorite Egyptian had been King Tut, who had moved the great capital, Cairo, to a better designed city somewhat to the south. It had been built at the crux of a mountain, with arms of the rock extending forward on both sides, enabling King Tut to protect the approach to the new capitol on all sides. You couldn't invade King Tut's city without its occupants seeing you.

Turner liked to talk about music. He claimed to know a lot about it. He said Beethoven was an idiot who spent his whole life crying about one woman because he didn't have the courage to move on and find another one. He liked Wagner, though he thought that Nietzsche was right in claiming that the "Percival" symphony was the beginning of the end of his career, because it was too conventional and too Christian. He loved Mozart. He thought that Mozart was the greatest classical musician ever. Turner liked modern music, too-- he would have liked country, but couldn't stand Southern accents. He preferred adult contemporary music. He said that adult contemporary radio stations should avoid 60's music, though. He liked Falco and Olivia Newton John. Olivia Newton John was his favorite pop singer. He said that you should really see her in an interview-- she was just the greatest.

Turner thought it was a shame that musicians always ended up dying from drugs or alcohol. He couldn't understand why someone would want to lose their edge that way. He said that Buddy Holly hadn't taken drugs, and therefore he should still be alive.

The fifties he loved. Turner pointed out that what we think of a retro wasn't retro then. We got our first suburbs then, and had won a war-- in part through superior planning. He also admired Hitler's "Blitzkrieg" plan, and thought his architecture and PR strategies were very powerful, but that he just hadn't been able to make his plans for the distant future of Germany work. America had had enough men and technological firepower to win, and they did win.

Turner said the Nazi experiments were stupid-- human subjects could be found nowadays who were willing guinea pigs-- just pay them some money, and they will show up with a smock on

ready to be cut into pieces and put back together again. He thought, though, that space exploration was really the best aspect of modern science-- he predicted a lot of discoveries could be made in space, especially concerning new types of metals, elements, and microchips.

Smith said that talking to Turner was like watching a space shuttle launch-- there was a some heat, a gout of smoke, and then everything just took off at a huge speed.

Bunt was interested in some of these ideas. He didn't know much about King Tut, and had thought he was just another pharaoh. He had heard about Hitler's loss in World War II, of course, but didn't know about his architectural innovations. Also, he hadn't heard much about experiments in space concerning new metals. He had the immediate and somewhat irrational urge to invest in a metallurgy company so his stocks would soar when a new metal was discovered.

Bunt decided to get off of the telephone. He thanked Katie Smith for her time (he had to interrupt her again to do so), and hung up.

He sat on his couch. He felt like a real loser for some reason. All of his failures-- Rose, the IA case, and others. . . all of them seemed to wash over him in an intense wave of failure.

If Bunt got Turner, wouldn't Gellarty try to marry him? Bunt would have to kiss her goodbye. A goodbye kiss that would earn him \$5000. Was it worth it?

What if Bunt gave up on the case? He could even lie to Gellarty and say they had found Turner dead or something. Then he could pocket the money, invest in some metallurgy stock, buy a new car and elope with Gellarty. But, then, Bunt and Gellarty might run into Turner someday. Or, he might even become famous. He could just see him and Gellarty sitting in some nice couch in a Los Angeles apartment when-- suddenly-- Scott Turner comes on the television talking about his big idea for a new Modern Art building. Gellarty would run out of there faster than light speed, and she wouldn't come back, either.

Bunt thought about that movie with Kevin Kostner, where he had been hired to protect Whitney Houston. They had fallen in love, because she had needed his help, and he had really turned out to be a great provider with an exciting secret life. Near the end of the movie, Kostner had taken a bullet for Houston. . . and when he left town in a plane, she came to see him off, and almost wanted to go off with him to wherever he was going to go.

What a fantasy! A pretty woman-- you impressed her with your commanding talents and skills, got her to fall in love with you, and even saved her life. She became like a devoted pet. Of course, the bullet you took for her would have been worth the pain. It would make you pass out, and then groan a little but only later, conveniently, when she visited you in the hospital.

Bunt went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror. He didn't look so hot. His hair was covered in white flecks of dandruff. His t-shirt was too small for his body and seemed to stretch in an almost made-for-women way at his pecs and armpits. He tried to squint his eyes.

Sometimes, in the evening light, with his eyes almost shut, he thought he looked like Christopher Reeves again in the mirror. Like a dark and handsome man.

He couldn't seem to fool himself this time.

Mr. Peters called early the next morning. Bunt heard the phone and jumped out of bed, almost hitting his head on the lamp, which threw an arc of bright light against the opposite wall. Bunt immediately felt a little out of it, as though he was watching himself getting a bypass operation on TV..

Bunt said hello to Mr. Peters, and then cleared his throat. It seemed to take a long time, but Mr. Peters said hello back. Mr. Peters gave a short but friendly speech, and said that he would hire Bunt for the position of a security guard. Bunt resisted the urge to collapse into himself in a happy dreamy way, and said thanks. Thanks Mr. Peters!

Mr. Peters started giving Bunt some details-- where to get his uniform, how to charge it to the landlord company, when to come into work, and where to pick up his patrol pattern sheets and duty sheets.

The sun shone in powerfully through the window. Bunt felt its beautiful heat on his shoulders and back. He said thanks once more to Mr. Peters, and affirmed, quite powerfully, that he would be there the next day at 8:30 AM with his uniform on.

Bunt called Gellarty.

He started yammering at her in his excitement. She asked him to slow down, please. She couldn't understand anything he was saying.

Bunt heard the air whispering between her always parted teeth. He pictured the part in her hair, her calm forehead, and just pretty much all of her looking really nice.

He told her he was getting a new outfit-- a uniform.

She said that was great. Did that have anything to do with Turner?

Definitely with Turner, said Bunt. He was going to take a job in the building where he used to work-- as a security guard.

Gellarty sounded excited. She wished him good luck.

Bunt said that he was closer now to Turner than ever.

He hung up the phone.

Bunt went to the shopping mall Mr. Peters had asked him to go to and purchased a security

guard's uniform. It only cost him \$80 of his remaining \$580 or so. The uniform was navy blue, with neo-military starched lines and slacks with a yellow stripe down both sides. This was the kind of outfit you would hate to wear at first, but might get used to after awhile. Like a dress shirt that itches, but feels like tossed cotton after an hour or so.

Chapter 5

Bunt went home. He put the outfit on, and looked at himself in the mirror. They always said that women loved men in uniform, and he could see why. . . the shirt and the striped slacks fit together in such a way that Bunt's belly seemed smaller. The epaulettes at his shoulders made him look sharper. In general, everything about the outfit looked neat and snappy. Bunt was proud of how he looked. He turned the bathroom light on full bright until the buttons on his shirt reflected white flashes, and practiced his mean look. He tightened his forehead, gritted his teeth, and made his eyes protrude a little, like they were prying into someone's thoughts, and were certain to find whatever crime lurked there.

He wondered how Gellarty would feel about his new outfit. He figured Turner's clothes fit him this well no matter what he was wearing. How was it that he was such a charmer, though, really? Was it the car? Could he actually have been genuinely nice to the women he swindled?

Bunt looked at himself in the mirror again. He looked fearsome. He looked like he could really scare somebody. Gellarty would have been impressed, he thought.

Bunt took off his uniform and went to bed. He couldn't resist an urge to punch his pillow smartly as he prepared to lie down-- it was almost as if he had become possessed by some military spirit that made him want to walk in straight lines and turn in perfect 90 degree angles. Maybe this was how people in boot camp resisted all the pain and exhaustion they experienced there and learned to love the military.

Bunt thought about famous military people. Basically, you had your MacArthurs, and you had your John Wayne as Patton types, he figured. John Wayne would have swaggered around his camp, with the strip on his helmet hanging loose, talking to his regiment in a drawling, familiar way. Tighten up there, Private, before the biscuit you ate for lunch makes your belt disappear, and so on. He would have made jokes like that, and everyone would have loved him, and no-one would have minded when he ate the best cut of steak every Friday night.

But, could he have won a war?

MacArthur could have. He would have been a model of puissance and virtue-- he would have trained his troops in a strict and disciplined manner, without humor, and with his eyes fixed always on the horizon-- he was a real military visionary. If the Geneva Convention said not to abuse prisoners of war, and the enemy was doing it, he would have invented his own convention and abused them anyway. When MacArthur and his regiment were done, there, quite simply,

would be no enemy troops left. Only Americans-- grim, disciplined, American supermen who would come home after the war and take over industries and run marathons.

They would be the kind of men whose muscles and sinews seemed to be fused to their bones, with no fat showing at all. Nothing would shake or shimmy when these men jumped-- instead, everything about them would pulse and clench. They would be able to predict the weather better than weathermen, and charm women with their sheer, glib ways.

Wayne's men would have returned home with their original accents intact, and a perfect familiarity with their mothers and their childhood bedrooms.

MacArthur's men would return as if each was the same man-- frightening, awesome, essences of masculinity and efficiency-- too damn good at everything to be pitied.

What happened to a man when he served under a MacArthur or a Sherman or even a Rommel? Did a part of his spirit die? Or was it just that his baby fat got trimmed? Maybe his fat was replaced with worldly knowledge and superhuman ability. A man who had not been to war, for example, might appear simply to be sitting somewhere-- on a couch, maybe-- seeming to be himself and him, in his house-clothes, and praising his household gods. A man who had been to war would always be in motion, even when sitting. You might sense that you were chasing a ghost if you watched him-- like Space Ghost or Wonder Woman's invisible airplane, you expected to see something where you knew it ought to be, but found to your surprise that it had already flown miles beyond its expected location.

Bunt began to dream-- he was the prosecuting attorney, representing the Navy, in a court martial hearing. A sea captain's crew had mutinied. The captain claimed that they had breached authority for no reason. The captain's crew said that the captain had punished them very frequently for strange and trivial things. The cook had been made to sit in confinement for 3 days because he had failed to produce fresh strawberries one morning. One man was forced to clean the entire surface of the ship, in very long shifts, because he had missed cleaning a small portion of his own vomit from the side of the ship after a few miles on a turbulent sea.

Bunt knew he could win the case. The captain was obviously insane, and it was right for his crew to mutiny. He unbuttoned his jacket and approached the captain in order to question him. Bunt's confidence began to collapse almost immediately. The captain explained that he and the crew had been patrolling potentially hostile waters at the time of the mutiny, and that strict discipline had to be maintained at all times. He said that the sailor who had vomited had been drinking whiskey in untoward amounts and against orders. He explained that, in terms of the strawberries, he just liked them.

A high ranking Naval officer then defended the captain. He explained that the captain had an outstanding record, and had served admirably in World War II, pioneering a new patrolling pattern that had enabled him to sink 5 U-Boats.

The court ruled that the captain was sane and competent, and that the entire crew of the ship,

aside from the captain, was to be dishonorably discharged. Also, Bunt was to be stripped of his station and left to his own devices. . .

The alarm sounded, and Bunt woke up.

Bunt took a shower, put on his uniform, and ate breakfast. He thought that maybe he had been dreaming, and remembered something about a courtroom and strawberries. He tried to shake of the residue of the dream.

Bunt headed for the office building. When he pulled into its parking lot, he tried to look up at the fourth floor. If he strained his neck, he could make it out through the corner of his eye. He figured he would get access to Labyrintspel later that day, after he had memorized his duty sheets and patrol patterns, and the UPS men had come and gone.

Bunt knocked on Mr. Peters' door. Mr. Peters' told him to come right on in. Bunt said hello, and that he was looking forward to his first day on the job. Mr. Peters' looked at him from behind his glasses for a moment, and seemed to be studying him. He said the uniform looked nice on Bunt. He emphasized that the tight lines of the uniform's shirt and slacks would loosen and become soft if he didn't send his uniform to the cleaners once a week.

Bunt said that he would, though he was secretly not planning to do anything of the kind. The uniform would be starched enough and snappy enough for the short time it would take to investigate Labyrintspel. Then he would put it in his closet for possible use in future cases.

Mr. Peters gave Bunt his patrol sheet. He explained that Bunt was to start on the first floor, and was to walk down every hallway in a surprisingly complex pattern, pausing at each external doorway and each stairwell doorway for several minutes, in case anyone was trying to sneak in or out of the building using the stairs or the first floor exits, or had gotten trapped in a stairwell. He was then to patrol the second, third and fourth floors, checking everyone's ID passes that he came across. Each floor had its own distinct patrol pattern.

Bunt tried not to sound disappointed when he saw that Labyrintspel was located in the second to last area he was supposed to patrol. He asked Mr. Peters if he could keep the patrol pattern sheets, and Mr. Peters said that he was allowed to keep the sheets for his first day only. Mr. Peters added that he would be checking around the building from time to time just to make sure that Bunt was doing things the way he was told to do them.

Mr. Peters then handed Bunt his duties sheet. He was supposed to, essentially, keep his patrol-- he was to continue patrolling every day from 9 AM to 5 PM with one 30 minute break for lunch at 2 PM (after everyone else had left for lunch and come back), and 2 15 minute breaks at 10 AM and 3:30 PM, when he could sit down for a minute or have a snack or something. There were also some rules. Bunt was not supposed to engage in long conversations with the building's employees, spend too much time in the bathroom (i.e. read a newspaper in the pot or such), or enter any of the building's business offices unless he had been told to do so or unless he strongly suspected that some form of foul play was afoot.

Mr. Peters asked Bunt if he thought the rules seemed workable. Bunt said they were O.K. and he would have no problem following them. Mr. Peters said, all right then, Mr. Smith-- get patrolling!

Bunt left Mr. Peters' office. He thought that the rules seemed easy enough to follow. In fact, the whole thing seemed like a piece of cake-- he could relax now. He looked up. At the corner of one of the halls, near an exit, was a video camera. There was a small red light blinking near where it was attached to the wall.

Bunt tensed up. It seemed as though, in fact, Bunt would be monitored by Mr. Peters quite thoroughly-- or, at least, that he could look through the security tapes afterwards if he suspected that Bunt had been up to anything.

The way that people behave in front of cameras is really bizarre, thought Bunt. They stand, walk and sit in a particular way, as though the person watching them would want to hire them to be in some kind of fashion magazine or something. Also, they usually either began to speak really loudly and clearly, or to mutter very quietly. Bunt thought about a television show he had seen, where people who had done stupid things at work had been caught on camera. Most of them were of people having sex in a restaurant's kitchen, or something. Sometimes, however, people were caught stealing money, or going into their boss's office and looking through his desk.

Bunt didn't want to get caught on camera doing anything stupid. Also, he had to stay employed for at least a little while, until he had had a chance to talk to some of the employees of Labyrinth. Of course, he knew, as well, that he wasn't supposed to go into any of the offices unless he had been told to do so-- or, and this was his golden ticket-- *unless he strongly suspected that something was afoot.*

Bunt continued to patrol the building for the rest of his first hour. At 10 AM, he exited the rear of the building, using his security pass in order to prevent an alarm from going off.

The fresh air was nice. An air-conditioned building was usually comfortable, but there was something more pleasant about "real" outside air. Bunt looked at the sky. The sun was part of the way to its noontime zenith, but was low enough to have been easily captured in a photograph-- which would have shown a horizon adorned with metal and glass buildings, and rolling hills crowded with smaller, red and brown houses and apartments, all showing long shadows.

Bunt walked over to a point along the building's wall that was between 2 windows. He opened his sport bag. He took out a package. He reached in his pocket and grabbed a small, spherical object. He flipped a switch on the object, and a small panel on its diameter turned green. He put the object in the package. He pulled some tape out of his bag, and taped up the box-- but only part of the way, so some of the space between the two top flaps was exposed-- showing a bunch of pink foam typical of such packages.

The package said:

Labyrintspel, Room 4B
Frisco Quad
395 Industrial Plaza
San Francisco, CA 86371

The return address said, simply:

Scott Turner

Bunt put the package back in his sports bag. He walked back inside the building.

Bunt had about 3 minutes left in his break. He paid a visit to Mrs. Fram. She waved hello to him-- she was talking on the phone-- probably to someone in the building who had been expecting a visitor or something.

Bunt waited a minute or so until she hung up the phone. He said hello to her, and asked, just out of curiosity, when the daily UPS delivery usually arrived at the building.

Mrs. Fram said that Fed Ex came at all hours, but that the main UPS delivery was at 11:30 AM every day. Mrs. Fram didn't even ask why Bunt wanted to know about the delivery. She had really warmed up to him now that he had been hired. Bunt felt a little sad that his hunt for Turner was going to force him to quit his job very soon. Mrs. Fram would have been a good friend-- he could tell.

Bunt resumed his patrol. At about 11:15 he did something somewhat dutiful-- an employee of one of the second floor buildings had gotten stuck in one of the stairwells. He had heard him knocking on the stairwell door during his patrol. He checked the frazzled man's pass-- it cleared. He let the man into the second floor hallway.

At 11:30, Bunt made a point of locating himself directly in front of Labyrintspel. At that moment, nothing was going on. Bunt slowed his pace. He looked up at the hallway camera. He pretended to hear something-- inclining his head, and cupping his hand to his ear. He moved to the window at the end of the hallway, and sidestepped until he was almost directly beneath the camera.

Bunt was breathing hard, and sweating a little. He had about 30 seconds-- after that, he would have to move back into the camera's view. Otherwise, Mr. Peters might think something strange was going on-- either right away, or when and if he viewed the day's tape.

Bunt heard the elevator ding at 11:31. It was Mrs. Fram. She was carrying a big stack of boxes. He could hardly see her behind the stack, it was so tall. Bunt walked up to Mrs. Fram, and said, Here-- let me help you with those. He took three packages off of the top of her stack-- the ones addressed to Labyrintspel. Mrs. Fram smiled and thanked him, and started walking toward

4C.

Bunt walked towards 4B. About half of the way there, he pretended to drop the three packages. His sports bag, which had been previously unzipped, stealthily emitted a fourth package. Bunt picked up all four packages, and knocked on the door at 4B.

A receptionist answered his knock. She was much younger than Mrs. Fram. She seemed attractive, but Bunt didn't take much time looking at her. He said that here was their mail and explained that Mrs. Fram had been a little overloaded. He handed the receptionist four packages.

She thanked Bunt and briskly closed the door-- which then locked automatically.

Bunt had the key to that door, but, of course, if he used it for no reason, the camera would show Mr. Peters that he had been doing something that was against the rules.

Bunt starting patrolling the halls again. He had a few hours to kill before lunch.

Chapter 6

Bunt had a nice lunch break. He went outside again, and ate a sandwich in the shade, an occasional breeze cooling him. His hands shook a little while he ate, and he had to spit on a napkin to wipe some mustard off of his uniform shirt that he had grandpa'd. All things considered, he had a fine lunch.

After about another hour of patrolling, with no one stuck anywhere and very few people to question regarding their building passes, he had again timed things so that, at precisely 3:04 PM, he was in front of the door to Labyrintspel.

Everything was quiet, and no one was in the hall. The camera light beamed steady and red. Bunt was about to start walking again, muttering a curse under his breath, when a loud ruckus erupted from 4B.

Bunt tried to act surprised. He started, in fact, quite nicely, hopping a little to one side. He reached in his pocket and took out the universal building key that Mr. Peters had given him. While he was unlocking the door to 4B, a loud sound emerged from behind the door, and Bunt heard screams and shouted obscenities as the sprinkler system kicked on in Labyrintspel's office.

Bunt smiled to himself, then put on his tough face.

He walked into the office of Labyrintspel.

The lobby featured one large, wooden desk. A kind of broad hallway opened behind the receptionist's desk, which led to office doors opening to the East and the West. As the hallway extended to the North, Bunt could see that it branched into several "T"s, which led East and West again, then ended in a branch to the East.

All of the office doors were open, and most of them were occupied by at least one man or woman, dressed in a business suit, waving his or her arms and / or shouting as the sprinkler system steadily drenched their clothing.

The receptionist was tearing around madly, trying to figure out what had happened. Bunt caught her by her jacket sleeve, and pointed to the stack of packages near the opening to the large hallway. One of the packages emitted a thin stream of smoke.

Bunt shouted, above all the employees' screaming and cursing: Smoke bomb! False alarm! False alarm!

Bunt walked over to a panel near the packages and unlocked it with his universal key. He flipped the switch that said "SPR" on it. The sprinklers stopped jetting water immediately, and the employees cheered a little and began to quiet down.

The receptionist thanked Bunt. He said no problem, and that it was part of his job. He added

that he had been a private detective for many years before becoming a security guard.

Bunt went over to the pile of packages and picked up the package that the smoke had been coming from. The return address said, simply:

Scott Turner

Bunt asked the receptionist if she knew anyone named Scott Turner? She said she personally didn't, but that he should talk to Mr. Garde, in the last office to the left. She said, I hope you catch that Turner. Labyrintspel didn't need that kind of soaking-- not at all.

Bunt thanked her and walked down the hall. There were more branches and "T's" than he thought an office that size would have-- this was a little like a maze.

Bunt reached the last "T" and turned to the left. He walked up to the door that said "George Garde / Personnel." Bunt knocked on the door.

A medium tall man with a balding head showing the remains of a previously full head of blonde hair opened the door. He asked Bunt if he could help him. The man looked a little upset-- he was wringing water from his tie.

Bunt asked, are you Mr. Garde? The balding man said that yes, he was. He asked Bunt rather grimly if he was looking for a job.

Bunt said he wasn't-- he had another kind of question.

Mr. Garde said that that was good because Labyrintspel hired almost exclusively through a Los Angeles placement firm.

Bunt looked around at Mr. Garde's office. It was very neat, though somewhat damp. There was a poster on the wall that looked straight out of the seventies-- it was a poster of three arrows-- one brown, one orange, and one yellow, running straight and parallel, and then breaking into different directions. The poster said, New Directions.

Mr. Garde's desk was almost clear, except for his computer, which he was recovering from under a trash bag. The computer monitor was facing away from Bunt, towards Mr. Garde's chair and a window showing a view of San Francisco to the North.

Bunt asked Mr. Garde if he knew what had just happened in Labyrintspel?

Mr. Garde said that he didn't. All he knew was that someone had yelled something about a fire, and then the sprinklers had kicked on. Mr. Garde had been busy at his desk, and was still trying to get everything dry so he could get back to work.

Bunt explained that someone had put a smoke bomb in a package addressed to Labyrintspel.

The bomb had gone off and the smoke had triggered the sprinkler system. No one was hurt, said Bunt.

Mr. Garde said he thought it was pretty terrible that someone would play a joke like that on an entire office-- especially a busy one.

Bunt agreed. He said that he was talking to Mr. Garde at the time because he wanted to catch the person responsible for the whole mess. He showed Mr. Garde the package, and its return address-- which said "Scott Turner."

Mr. Garde was quiet for a moment, and then looked confused. He said-- wasn't it odd that a person would put their name on a package intended as a practical joke?

Bunt said that he had spent years as a detective before taking his job as a security officer, and he had seen criminals do this kind of thing all the time. Like returning to the scene of a crime, or even showing up in the crowd behind a newscaster covering the crime and waving at the camera. Some criminals had a lot of bravado, he said-- and, once they've gotten away with a crime, they think they can do anything and they won't get caught.

Mr. Garde nodded. He turned on his computer and told Bunt to watch the printer.

Bunt waited for about ten seconds, and then a piece of computer paper came out of the printer. It had an address on it-- a Los Angeles address.

Mr. Garde said that this was the strangest thing he had ever heard of, but that he had employed a man several years back named Scott Turner, back when the company was still called "Forward Thinking Enterprises". Mr. Turner had been in accounting, and had remained at the firm for about 2 months before quitting. Mr. Garde said that the address on the piece of paper was the address Mr. Turner had given Labyrintspel when he had been hired. Why Scott Turner would send a package with a smoke bomb in it to Labyrintspel was beyond him, and what was weirder was that he would have put his name on the return address.

Bunt asked Mr. Garde what Mr. Turner had looked like. Mr. Garde said that he was medium tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes. He was very slender, and very pale. Mr. Garde said that people at Forward Thinking Enterprises used to call him "Scoot" because he always walked as fast as most people run.

Bunt smiled. He thanked Mr. Garde, and shook his hand. Bunt said, we'll track down that Scoot and end his scamming PDQ.

Mr. Garde said that was good. He was about to turn away towards his computer again to resume working when he looked up at Bunt and said-- and your name is again?

Bunt told him, "Bunt Smith".

Mr. Garde said, good work, Bunt. I will give you a good review. I will talk to Mr. Peters about what you did today to help Labyrintspel.

Bunt thanked Mr. Garde again, and left his office.

He left Labyrintspel.

He walked out into the hallway and went up to the camera. He held the package in one hand and the smoke bomb in the other, and said to the camera, smoke bomb-- no problem. The red light of the camera stared back at him with nary a wink.

Bunt went down to Mr. Peters' office. Mr. Peters was on the telephone. Bunt told him that he had been patrolling near 4B when he had heard some shouting and an alarm. He said that someone had delivered a package to Labyrintspel with a smoke bomb in it, and that the smoke bomb had set off the sprinkler system. He said that no one had been hurt.

Mr. Peters said he knew all about it-- he had just been talking to Labyrintspel's receptionist on the telephone.

Bunt handed Mr. Peters the incriminating package and advised him to file a police report implicating Scott Turner as the practical joker. He showed Mr. Peters the return address on the package.

Mr. Peters looked a little confused. He said he would certainly file a police report, but that he was surprised that the practical joker would have put his name on the package.

Bunt said that Mr. Garde, the personnel manager of Labyrintspel, had known Scott Turner-- he was an ex-employee of the firm. Bunt said that Turner probably had had some sour grapes about something that had happened to him while he was working there-- or a had developed a really destructive sense of humor, one or the other.

Mr. Peters thanked Bunt for his thoroughness, and complimented him for his performance on his first day at the building. He said he would make a good employee.

Bunt thanked Mr. Peters, and said he was enjoying his job. He had even gotten to know a few people-- which was more than he had expected.

Bunt looked out of Mr. Peters' window at a cloudy California sky, and felt somewhat exhausted for a moment. Many clouds were flying past the sun very quickly-- there must have been quite a breeze that day, blowing hard off of the Pacific Ocean.

Bunt snapped out of his daze and told Mr. Peters that he would go ahead and finish his patrolling for the day.

Mr. Peters said that would be fine.

Bunt was about to walk through the door and out into the hallway when he suddenly turned around. He went up to Mr. Peters and shook his hand. He said to Mr. Peters that he was a good boss-- Bunt could tell.

Mr. Peters looked surprised and pleased. He thanked Bunt once again, and said that he hoped that he was. He tried.

Bunt nodded, and left Mr. Peters' office. He closed the door behind him-- for a third and final time.

Bunt walked down several hallways until he reached the exit door. He put his key in the lock. He turned the key, and walked out the door. Bunt dropped his key in the grass next to the exit.

He walked around the building to its Western side-- where the building's entrance was located. He got in his car, started its engine, and drove away. His smile was somewhat dampened, but he was smiling nonetheless.

He was now hot on Turner's trail.

Bunt stopped by his house and changed into a normal pair of slacks. He put on his tank top, and a button down shirt, and grabbed a map of Los Angeles from his desk. The map was a few years old, but it should work alright, thought Bunt.

Bunt got in his car. He headed for the edge of town. He filled his tank full of gas, and got on the highway.

Bunt headed for Los Angeles. He started thinking about fronts he could use to confront Turner. Could he pose as a salesman-- thought Bunt-- or as an F.B.I. agent? Probably a salesman wouldn't even get through Turner's front door. Most people said no thanks immediately to salesmen-- through their mail slot. An F.B.I. agent might do the trick, but if Turner was as smooth as Gellarty said he was, he would probably pretend to be someone else at the front door and get away out the back or something.

Bunt actually had a fake F.B.I. identification card he could use to nab Turner-- it was under his floormat, in case he got pulled over.

Bunt really wanted to get Turner. He didn't care if Gellarty went off with him-- just to see her smile and look interested again in something other than the clouds in the distant sky would be enough of a reward. The other \$4000 she was going to pay him wouldn't hurt, either.

Bunt adjusted his mirror.

He felt that he knew Turner pretty well-- his general appearance, plus his dressing habits-- nice suits, often of light colors, should be enough to give him a "make". He also knew that he

had been called, “Scoot”-- the guy was a fast walker-- and very skinny. Maybe he was a runner or a triathlete, or worked out a lot, or something.

Most importantly, he had his address-- Mr. Garde had given him his best clue yet. It should lead him straight to Turner.

Bunt imagined some blonde, wiry guy at an exercise bike, cranking it up until his legs were almost a blur, barely breaking a sweat or breathing hard. Maybe the guy was just an animal, thought Bunt-- a real fitness fiend. Or, maybe he was inspiring himself by looking at the butt of some innocent single chick on the stairmaster right in front of him. Bunt couldn't help but picture Gellarty's butt on the stairmaster for a moment, which made him flinch. Then, he had an idea--

He would pose as Gellarty's husband. He would claim to be on a mission to make sure that Turner didn't want her back, or wasn't going to try to interfere with their marriage. Turner wouldn't suspect a thing.

Once he had verified that Turner lived at the Los Angeles address, he would show up again-- the next time, with Gellarty. She would have to make a big decision then-- whether to propose to him or not-- and he would have to make a decision of his own-- without having the option of just running away with no explanation like he had before.

Bunt thought that Gellarty would probably ask Turner to marry her. She seemed really vacant and kind of depressed to Bunt, which, though it didn't hinder her appearance much, did worry him a little. Her life was wanting something, and she was wanting something. Turner had seemed to her like the perfect man-- attractive, powerful, wealthy-- and time probably had only make her fascination with Turner more intense.

On the other hand, he expected Turner to say no to her proposal. The guy just didn't seem capable of committing to anyone. He had stood up six women-- maybe more-- and, though Gellarty was an amazing woman, like a West Coast Gothic Rose, he just didn't have the backbone to say yes to a proposal and make it stick.

Bunt looked down at his waistline. With the uniform off and a normal shirt on, he looked pretty portly again. Plus, he hadn't bothered to put on any hair gel. His hair was, in fact, blowing around like crazy. You would think that would cure dandruff, but it tended to make it worse.

He thought about Rose. He wondered-- what if she had met him at the office building, where he was working as a security guard? He had always believed that she had left him because she had thought he was on his way to becoming successful and would be leaving town soon anyway for a better job. What if she had found him years later, in a more stable position? Would she have blown him off entirely, or would she have been more interested in him, or maybe even stayed with him for a longer time?

He felt a wave of humiliation. He had really stiffed Mr. Peters, and that guy had seemed nice.

He was probably used to people coming and going as security guards-- but had he ever had someone leave after one day, and without giving notice? 9 AM tomorrow would roll around, and Mr. Peters would probably wonder where the hell Bunt was. So would Mrs. Fram, and maybe even Mr. Garde.

Bunt liked being a detective, and was a pretty good liar when he needed to be. But he didn't want to make a habit out of it. He didn't want to be like Turner and start making commitments to all kinds of people and then breaking them without telling them why.

When Rose had left him, he had carried on for 2 days before realizing she was really gone. He had tried to call her several times, and she hadn't answered her phone. He had assumed she had left suddenly to visit her parents-- maybe there had been a family crisis or something. Finally, on the third day, he had gone by her apartment to check on her, and had seen a "For Rent" sign in the window of one of the first floor apartments. He had gone up the stairs to her apartment, starting to freak out a little, and had tried to open her apartment door with a key she had left him in case of emergency. The lock had been changed.

The sunny sky that day may as well have been filled with thunderheads-- Bunt wouldn't have noticed. He had driven home in a daze.

He had called her landlady, and she had said that Rose had moved out two days earlier, and hadn't left her a forwarding address or anything.

Bunt then had become somewhat violent. He had tried to think of someone to beat up, but it wasn't anybody's fault. He ended up kicking his kitchen trash can-- real hard. It didn't even have the good grace to dent.

Bunt then sat down intending to have a good cry, but suddenly felt his sadness, and a great deal of his joy, simply leave him. It was almost as if a part of himself had flown away-- where to he did not know. He ended up gazing at his apartment wall for a good long time, his eyes unfocused, tear ducts dry, unable to tear-- he was completely at a loss.

For the next few months, Bunt had felt flashes of absurd hope now and then. He had invented wild theories about how Rose might come back someday-- maybe she had had a breakdown of her own, and gone away for awhile to rehabilitate. Or had just gotten upset and needed to visit her parents to vent for a few months. Bunt couldn't imagine why she would have been upset, but, in a twisted way, he had hoped that was why she had left. Anything to imagine that Rose would come back.

He had even spent time at her apartment building, hoping to see her car pull up, or to catch a glimpse of her in her apartment window. Each time he would sit in his car, strangely excited in an unfocused way, yet, simultaneously on the verge of violence. Sometimes people would walk by, but when he saw they weren't Rose, he didn't care who they were.

Intermittently he would spend a few minutes looking at the point where the road met the sky,

staring with ferocious intensity at cars as they approached, hoping that one of them would belong to Rose.

Every time he had tried to wait for Rose to return, after about an hour or so, he would begin to feel heavy. His excitement would slowly dissipate, like air from a nicked tire. Usually this happened at about sunset. The giant red sun would topple, dying, into the sea, and an oppressive darkness, its shadows spreading like cold skeletal fingers, would slowly crush the day and the rest of Bunt's intensity into a mere memory.

If anyone had looked in Bunt's car window then, under the lonely light of a streetlamp, they would have thought he was looking at a ghost, not a man-- looking vacantly, unfocused, into the distance, seeing nothing, and not noticing that he didn't.

Bunt felt a deep, bittersweet sadness wash through his body. He felt that a part of himself had left and would never return, and that the West was really his now, with all of its vast, beautiful, empty vistas, their expanses stretching before him; forever a home for broken-hearted men.

Dusk had fallen over California, and the outskirts of Los Angeles was a crowded clutter of lights.

Bunt had been kind of hypnotized there for awhile. The regular stretches of gray highway, lit by highway lamps, and an occasional passing car, gradually brought him back to awareness. He felt, then, a sharpness, and an eagerness-- this was a new city-- mostly unfamiliar to Bunt. Under all of the sweat and fatigue was a man who was on the verge of an unpredictable opportunity-- perhaps a life-changing one-- and Bunt knew it.

He just had to find that low life Turner and figure out how to get him, once and for all, to stop running away from women like Gellarty.

He was going to dig him out of his hole-- pry him off the street like a smashed hubcap-- flush him out of his home, and make him his mark.

He thought for a fleeting moment of Gellarty-- her image seemed to float through his mind like a woman made of ether-- through her transparent body he could see Los Angeles growing larger, closer, and more vital.

This city was not quiet. It was like a network of apartments, clubs, restaurants, and office buildings-- many whose windows were still illumined from within. Cars moved along the city streets like digitized syllables in a telephone cable. The city refused to go to sleep-- it would remain active and full of energy all night long.

Scott Krull was taking Veval Hamm out to the movies. He pulled up to the most expensive Omniplex in San Francisco, and escorted Ms. Hamm to the theater door, while a valet parked his white sedan.

There were many people waiting to purchase tickets-- most of them, in fact, were as nicely dressed as Scott and Veal.

Veal moaned a little, and said to Scott that she thought they would never get tickets. The line was too long.

Scott told her not to worry, and ushered a now very surprised looking Veal Hamm past the line and through the theater's double entrance doors.

Scott walked right up to the ticket agent, and showed him a card he had pulled out of his wallet. The ticket man looked at the card very quickly, and said, Go right on in, Sir and Ma'am. Take your choice of films, and watch as many as you please. Here are two tickets for concessions, feel free to trade them in for popcorn, sodas, cappuccinos, or whatever you want at the concessions stand. These tickets are a \$20 value. Feel free to ask me for more complimentary concessions tickets if you wish. Have a nice evening!

Scott and Veal walked into the main lobby. Scott held her still for a moment and looked at the marquee signs above each hallway. After a moment, he said, There it is! The Fountainhead.

Veal seemed excited. Scott had said that The Fountainhead was a very important novel that had been made into a movie. The critics had given the movie bad reviews; this was because they had misunderstood the plot and had underestimated its significance.

Scott said that the character Howard Roark was one of the most important figures in modern fiction. His ideas about architecture, his philosophy in general, and his attitude and abilities defined what people mean today when they say the word progress.

If Roark had been alive during the 1980's, he would have helped to design the kinds of office plazas that made Reaganomics a lasting phenomenon-- and if he had designed them, they would have been more appreciated. Those office parks, like buildings designed by Roark, had been some of the most pragmatic constructions made in American history-- they remain as the best examples of the progressive economic optimism that existed during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

Scott told Veal that Roark had been a misunderstood genius, and only his wealthy patroness, presumably a literary personification of Ayn Rand, had tried to promote his genius. Scott pointed out that even Shakespeare had needed to have patrons, and that one of his most famous sonnets had been written about his beautiful, dark-skinned patroness.

Scott had asked Veal to pay very close attention to the movie, and to think about what Ayn Rand was trying to say about the world, and how important her ideas really were concerning progress and modernization. He had pointed out that a lot of people hated Ayn Rand, but that she had been the only 20th century writer brutally honest enough to write about what people really needed, prioritized and valued in modern society.

He had asked her to really think about what a Temple devoted to Man, rather than to God, might signify, and had suggested that Rand and her character Roark had been closer to exploring and portraying the true potential of modern man than anyone before them had.

Veal had been a little skeptical at first. She tried not to betray her doubts to Scott. Veal was familiar with radically new ideas like these. Like the mental stimulants people advertised on late night TV, they made people think that a pill or something can help make them smarter than other people, and it just wasn't so.

Her mother had always warned her against radical ideas that made big promises, like all of those fantastic body-building or mind-enhancing schemes, and other modern phenomena. She had, in particular, spent an hour or so making fun of Scientology, and had dared anyone to make heads or tails out of what L. Ron Hubbard was trying to push with it all-- Scientology was just a bunch of hype and technophilia.

Veal had agreed with her mother at the time, but had then learned that famous people like John Travolta and Tom Cruise were Scientologists. How could a philosophy be wrong when some of the world's most successful people touted it?

Veal had had a crush on Tom Cruise. He was like a perfect man, really-- handsome, powerful, intense-- and smart, somehow, in just the way a modern man ought to be smart-- in the way that enabled him to actually do things, not just to talk about them.

Veal had been similarly captivated by Scott Turner. He had seemed a little fanatical at first, but his handsome, powerful presence, together with the confident way he talked about things, eventually left little room for doubt.

Eventually, Veal had become completely entranced by Turner. She hadn't realized this until today, but she really had always need something like Scientology in her life. She often had high hopes, for example, but had no system to back her up when she had had them. People like L. Ron Hubbard and Ayn Rand (and, of course, Scott Turner) might really help her to become someone important.

Hallmark suddenly seemed like a waste of time to her. She could probably think of a dozen ways Hallmark could improve the way they ran their business, and felt that she ought to be the person who made these changes. Scott Turner, an esteemed American visionary respected her, and Hallmark should, as well.

Scott Turner and his ideas had made her eyes light up in a special way for the first time since George had left her. In fact, George had nothing on Scott. Veal was actually looking at the world around her with great enthusiasm for the first time in a long while. Today, for example, she had noticed that the script used on Walgreens signs was the same typeface her PC produced when she designated the setting, "Verdana Italics". She had realized that she had a graphics program that would let her turn her script into a graphic. Then she could fill in certain parts of the script with different colors, or even put a huge colored oval or square around the script and

make a template for a sign that way! Veval could quit Hallmark, and become a signage designer, and make a million dollars on her own. It would be so much bigger and better than designing greeting cards for Hallmark!

Bunt brought Veval a cappuccino and a huge tub of popcorn. Scott and Veval sat down in the theater that was showing the movie, The Fountainhead. Scott even made a man move over so that Veval could have a chair to put her coat on.

Veval was so excited that she was sitting on the edge of her seat, like she was ready to just dive into the movie screen and become a character in the film.

Veval found the film to be very engaging and convincing, and Scott's occasional remarks, pointing out, for example, Roark's university's rejection of his early architectural vision, and his first meeting with his patroness, the Ayn Rand character.

Veval thought that Roark could have been even better than he was. Why was his Temple of Man so short, for example? He should have made it into a huge skyscraper, with a metal steeple and a lounge for adherents on the forty-fifth floor.

After the movie, Veval felt a little spaced-out; she had been so carried away. But she couldn't stop thinking about Rand and Hubbard and Roark, and, especially, Turner, her superman.

She shared most of her ideas with Turner, and he nodded enthusiastically, and even hugged her, when she told him about them. He seemed to think just the way she did now about things. Veval had really changed in a few weeks, and changed for the better. It was like an American Revolution.

Turner took her home in his Cadillac Sedan, and Veval and Turner made tasteful but brutal love for many hours on Veval's brand new silk sheets.

Bunt pulled over from the highway beneath a very tall lamp. He took his map of Los Angeles out, unfolded it, and looked at it carefully under the streetlamp. It should be easy enough to find Turner's house, thought Bunt-- just a few streets off of the Northern border of Los Angeles, and he would be there.

Bunt looked at his watch-- it read: 8:30 PM.

Bunt pulled back onto the highway, drove for about 3 more miles, and turned off at exit 12b. He took a right at the stoplight, and drove straight for several miles. The street he was driving on was full of bars and lounges. Neon signs, quite new and sophisticated-looking, identified these establishments and tried to beckon newcomers inside. The bars had names like, "Big Fish in a Small Pond", "Tsunami", "Pacific Breeze", and so on.

Bunt hadn't been in a good bar in a long time. He liked to have a beer or two at home-- a

Budweiser-- but he didn't like drinking in public. It made him sleepy. He used to go out drinking. Eventually, he realized that he could only get that "good buzz" people liked once every five or so tries, and, when he did, he usually made the mistake of drinking five or six more beers quite rapidly. Bunt figured he wasn't so much of an alcoholic as a drinker who, once he was enjoying himself, simply wanted to have too much fun too quickly.

Bunt kept driving. He had to squint a little to make out the cross street signs. After about 3 miles, he found the cross street he was looking for, and turned right.

This street had a few bars, as well, but was mostly comprised of hip businesses like "Borders Books" and "Starbucks Cafe". This was the 'burbs, so things were kind of spread out-- a few businesses were in one strip center per block. Definitely the kind of neighborhood a person would have to own a car to enjoy.

Bunt turned left after a mile or so, and started looking for Turner's subdivision. The lights became more sparse, and, every quarter mile or so, you could see a sign illuminated with spotlights, surrounded by a few palm trees, indicating in flowing pastel script the subdivision of which it declared to be the entrance.

Bunt drove for about five miles down this road, through residential Los Angeles. He was beginning to get antsy when he found the subdivision he was looking for: Perpetual Oasis.

The entrance to the Perpetual Oasis subdivision shimmered a little in the evening heat. Waves of heat, stored in the road's asphalt, were still merging one after another with the night air.

Bunt turned right into Perpetual Oasis, and started looking for Mirage Lane. He found it after a few minutes-- it curved gracefully off to the left of the subdivision's main road. Bunt followed Mirage Lane for a half a mile, until he found the house he was looking for: 5645 Mirage Lane.

5645 was a ranch-style house with somewhat Eastern features-- the roof was slightly peaked, and hung over the side of the house, curving ornamentally at its edges. There were strange iron letters, in intricate script, screwed into the olive-green front door-- 3 of them. He couldn't quite make them out. To each side of the door were glass walls, about 3 feet long and six inches thick, comprised of what looked like the bottom halves of soda bottles.

Bunt drove on for about 50 yards, and parked his car in a darkened spot between street lamps. He didn't want Turner to know what kind of car he had, because he planned on returning with Gellarty tomorrow, and didn't want to scare Turner away when he did.

Bunt got out of his car and walked up to the front door of 5645 Mirage Lane. He felt extremely jittery, and simultaneously full of wild hope, as though he was a hot, shaken Coca Cola bottle about to explode in a fountain of sick warm syrup and carbonation. He pushed the doorbell with a shaking finger.

A chime went off calmly inside the house-- Bunt thought he recognized a measure from one

of Mozart's symphonies.

Bunt waited about 30 seconds, looking around nervously, and almost afraid to fix his gaze on the door.

No one answered.

Bunt rang the bell again, and waited for a period of time he could not determine. Then, he rang it three times in sequence, making the first few notes of Mozart's measure cut off and repeat rapidly.

The door opened. Bunt's heart skipped a beat.

From the darkness behind the door, a man's voice said: Yes?

Bunt said, Hello! I am a friend of Sean Gellarty's. He paused, and then decided to go on. Sean and I are married now, he babbled, and I want to speak with Scott Turner, please, to make sure he is okay with that.

Scott who? The voice said.

Scott Turner, replied Bunt.

The man behind the door opened the door completely, and said, come on in.

Chapter 7

He was moderately tall, and very broad at the shoulder. He was wearing an expensive-looking pair of tan slacks, and a designer Hawaiian shirt, hanging loosely over the top of the slacks. His hair-- Bunt grimaced-- was dark, and his eyes were brown. This man obviously wasn't Scott Turner.

Bunt went in anyway. He began to follow the dark haired man down a long entrance hallway.

Excuse me, sir? asked Bunt. Where is Mr. Turner?

The man said, without turning around-- And your name is?

Bunt, said Bunt. Bunt Smith. I am Sean Gellarty's husband.

The man with dark hair turned around suddenly, and two more men, neither of them resembling Turner, appeared at his side from the next room.

The man with dark hair pulled a wallet out of his pocket and flashed his identification card. Greg Torke, F.B.I., he said. These are my associates. Mr. Smith, please come with me.

The other two men took Bunt, one holding each shoulder, and handcuffed him. The man on his right emptied his pockets into a ziploc bag.

Bunt was led to what appeared to be the house's basement. The basement was finished, with wooden paneling and brown carpet, short shag. Bunt's hands were tied behind his back, but his mouth wasn't gagged, and he could move his head around freely.

To his right was a lamp-lit table with the contents of his pockets spread out on it. He could see his comb, his sunglasses, his map of Los Angeles, and a few pieces of lint.

Bunt was secretly relieved that he had not brought his wallet in with him-- or his fake F.B.I. identification card, for that matter.

The two mysterious F.B.I. agents were sitting on a couch behind the table. They looked similar-- not like identical twins, but like distant cousins, perhaps-- both with curly red hair, blue eyes, and short, stocky builds.

The tall, dark agent was standing in front of Bunt, looking down at him from his fully-erect height.

Agent Torke said, Well, Mr. Smith-- if that is who you really are-- what is your business with Scott Turner?

Bunt said that Turner had had an affair with his new wife, Sean Gellarty, about a month ago. Mr. Turner had left her without an explanation, and she had married Bunt soon thereafter.

Bunt said that he had come to Los Angeles to ask Turner if he was alright with that, and to request that he not interfere with his and Sean Gellarty's marriage.

Bunt said that Gellarty still talked about Scott Turner sometimes, and he was getting a little worried.

The agent paused for a moment, then nodded. He asked Bunt why he had tried to find Scott Turner at this address.

Bunt admitted that he had been trying to find Scott Turner for awhile. He had gone so far as to ask an old employer of Scott's, a Mr. Garde at Labyrinthspel (previously "Forward Thinking Enterprises", where Gellarty had said that Scott worked), if he knew where to find Mr. Turner. Mr. Garde had given him this address.

The dark-haired man said that Bunt was quite a detective.

Bunt said that jealous husbands often are.

The dark-haired man didn't laugh. He chewed on his lower lip for a moment, looking very serious, and switched gears.

Where were you December 8th, 1998? asked the agent.

Bunt thought about the question for a moment.

I don't remember, said Bunt.

One of the two red-haired detective looked up sharply, as though he thought he had heard something significant.

Try harder, said Agent Torke. This is important.

Bunt thought for another moment, and then had a flash of memory.

I was in San Francisco, said Bunt, dating a woman named Rose, and looking for a job. I was fresh out of grad school in '98.

Agent Torke said, Did you go anywhere near the East Coast?

No, said Bunt-- like I said, I was in San Francisco. Maybe when Rose left me she went to the East Coast. But I didn't.

One of the red-headed agents chuckled. The second one elbowed him.

Agent Torke took a deep breath.

Agent Torke stepped back a few paces, and said: Mr. Smith, I advise you to stop looking for Mr. Turner. You have no need to contact him, you understand? You will not try to find him.

I will tell Mr. Turner about your marriage with Sean Gellarty myself, you understand?

Bunt clenched his fist behind his back in frustration, but said, as calmly as possible-- I will not try to find Scott Turner.

Yes, said the dark-haired agent-- you understand me. I am going to untie your hands now, and I am going to show you out of this house, and you are going to drive away, and we will never see one another again, will we?

Bunt said, Alright, Agent Torke.

Try not to look so sad, said the dark-haired agent.

He untied Bunt's hands, and he and the two red-haired agents led him up a staircase, through a living room-type area, down a long hall, and out the front door.

Bunt started down the walkway, and, after a moment, he looked back. Agent Torke was standing in the doorway, with the two red-haired agents flanking him-- one on each side. Agent Torke waved somewhat mechanically.

Bunt turned back around and resumed walking towards his car, feeling weak and somewhat shaken. His wrists hurt a little where they had been tied.

The red haired agent watched Bunt disappear into the darkness that enveloped Mirage Lane. He looked up at Agent Torke, and said-- Does he know about the trial?

Agent Torke slapped him on the shoulder. Not sure, said Torke. He has an alibi, but it might be a cover. We'll put a tail on him and see what he's up to, and if he has anything to do with the Deacons.

Agent Torke said, Now go get Garde on the phone and tell him he has earned a bonus. Our arrangement seems to be working very nicely. . . and get the chief on the line, and tell him to get a make on one Bunt Smith, 25-30 years old, brown hair, 220-230 pounds, medium height. Plus, tell him to run a few loose tails on a 1993 Ford Fairmont, brown, license plate DSY-8U3.

When did you see his car? asked the second red-haired agent.

Security cam, said Agent Torke. Right corner sweep.

The red haired agents left Greg's side and disappeared into the house at 5645 Mirage Lane.

Agent Torke remained in the doorway for a moment.

Bunt's car did not pass him. He must have left by taking Mirage Lane to the South.

This Bunt Smith was a canny guy, in his own way, thought Agent Torke. I hope we don't have to tighten up those tails. . .

Bunt's car, viewed from a helicopter, would have been progressing steadily, though slowly, back along the route he had first taken to Mirage Lane. An onlooker might have been somewhat concerned about his mental state-- maybe he was an elderly driver, or somewhat intoxicated-- because his car seemed to weave a little now and then, and at 3 signals, the car behind him had had to honk before he started rolling.

Bunt himself felt crushed. That address had been his best lead so far, and now he would have to tell Gellarty that he hadn't found Turner-- and that the F.B.I. had somehow gotten involved,

asking him to break off the hunt.

Bunt felt a little like he had when Rose had first left him. He felt a certain heaviness-- an oppressive weight. He also kept drifting unwittingly into space; he seemed somewhat unconsciously to be protecting himself from the significance of what had happened that night. He couldn't seem to grab the bull by the horns-- it would have gored him until he had bled to death instead.

Bunt looked around him, having snapped into focus for a moment. He was back by the highway, in the bar district.

Bunt thought about calling Gellarty, but the task didn't seem immediately feasible, and he let the idea just drift away like pipe smoke.

Bunt's throat was dry, and his mood was downright apocalyptic.

He parked his car in a lot near several bars. He dug his wallet out of his glove compartment and put it in his pocket. He combed his dark hair back until the locks rested smoothly against his scalp. They were probably filled with dandruff, but he didn't mind. These kinds of bars were dark inside, and no one would be able to tell.

Bunt got out of his car and entered a bar called, "The Shark."

Bunt thought about sitting at the main bar, on a stool. But the lights above the drinks and mirrors would have made him into somewhat of a spectacle.

Neither were there any open tables.

Bunt walked around for awhile, and then bought a beer (\$6-- what a joke), in order not seem like he was a drifter looking for a place to crash.

After about 20 minutes, a group of shiny, tan, laughing young women picked up their fashionable purses, and their cellular telephones, and left a table in the corner of the bar empty. Bunt watched the three women walk by, and couldn't help, absurdly, gazing at one of the women's curves for a moment. Like three psychics, the women burst immediately into a round of the giggles.

Bunt sat down at the table. He took off his outer shirt and hung it from one of the chairs, so that people were less tempted to give him hell for taking up an entire table for himself.

Bunt looked around at the clientele. Most of The Shark's customers looked young and well-to-do. They looked, in fact, like models, only with a slightly off feature here and there-- eyes a little large or small-- just slightly so-- or, a nose that was just a little too small-- just enough to prevent them from being featured on the cover of GQ or Cosmopolitan.

There were a few men and women Bunt's age, but they were all dressed very elegantly, and seemed completely at ease-- the men in their work suits, jackets off or unbuttoned, cologne wafting pleasantly through the bar, set free by body heat-- the women in navy or tan work suits, or white shirts and slacks, makeup perfectly intact 15 hours after it had put on, speaking fluidly and easily about business or harmless details concerning their neighbors or girl- or man-friends, in spite of their partial or complete drunkenness. Bunt figured they would continue speaking just that calmly and fluidly no matter how many cocktails they drank.

Bunt didn't give himself the luxury of looking too long or hard at any one of the women. He felt that he no longer deserved to.

He sat at the corner table, with his back against the wall-- just like he should have, according to Thompson and McBain, if he was afraid of getting held up or hit. He could see everyone and everything in the bar.

Bunt thought about a story by McBain he had read-- The Con Man. Some kids had found what is known as a "floater"-- that is, a body in a river, of, apparently, a woman who had drowned. The body had had very few identifying marks. Just its teeth, its decaying fingertips, and a small tattoo that had said "Mac".

Thanks to the precinct's teamwork, the cops had identified the "floater" within just a few days. Cotton Hawes had done a search through another Precinct's records, and had found a missing person's file with a similar description.

With very little to go on, Carella's precinct had tracked down the killer-- just 150 or so pages later. They had reached an apparent dead end or two, but hadn't given up. They had found their man.

McBain was, however, a master of fiction. His stories were police procedurals-- but, much like that tricky old ghoul H.P. Lovecraft, he liked using somewhat fictive details in seemingly "real" forms-- neo-real dental records, apparently accurate police techniques, etc.-- to ensure that his ""realistic" detectives always solved their cases.

But this was real life. Bunt had had only a few clues to go on concerning Turner, and, though he thought he had come close to finding him, he had been soundly rebuffed at the threshold of success.

Maybe, thought Bunt, the man really is too smooth to catch-- just like Gellarty and the other women had said.

Bunt ordered another beer. He thought for some reason about the unfortunate people who had those terrible coke bottle glasses. You didn't see that very often nowadays-- just in your parent's yearbooks from back in the fifties. Wouldn't that give you tunnel vision? Thought Bunt. Like, if you were looking through the bottom of a coke bottle, and someone moved at the periphery of your vision, you wouldn't be able to see both ahead of yourself and to the side, would you?

Bunt looked at the bartender in an unfocused way-- as if through the pink film of some psychic eyelid. She looked like a fuzzy, sexy MTV Star that way-- like an Aguilera or a Britney Spears. She seemed to move in a crass way, though-- like she was used to being looked at. Female bartenders had that way about them-- they not to slink around, like other women at bars. The move around quite forcefully, from one customer to another. They don't want to cat about too much. That's because the female bartender is every drunk man's best friend sometimes a wife to be, as well.

Bunt finished his second beer. He had slammed it pretty quickly. He ordered another one.

There were times when Bunt seemed, for awhile, to escape from under God's thumb, with all of his debts and poverty and detective work, and to inhabit the white, starry corners of the universe, where cosmic nurseries were slow to arrive, and only a few, milky white stars glimmered prettily. For an indeterminate amount of time, Bunt Sidecull inhabited these starry corners of space. Who he looked at, what he saw, what his beer tasted like-- no one could really say. He was, for a short time, a sort of stream-crosser-- if Nirvana was everywhere that God wasn't. Or Scott Turner.

Bunt woke up in his car. He panicked immediately, then spotted his wallet, shirt and sunglasses on the floor of his car. Something was sticking in his ass. When he reached around to figure out what it was, he felt a terrible pain in his head-- beads of hot intensity had formed suddenly and exploded in his forehead. Then, it seemed as though a boiling pot of molasses with shards of glass in it was sitting on his medulla, and moving around made the molasses burn new and tender parts of his brain.

What was poking him in his ass, he discovered, was simply his comb.

Bunt, with fear in his heart, looked out of his windshield to see where he was. The car parked in front of him was a 1999 Honda Accord, light blue. His neighbor's. He was home, in San Francisco.

Sometimes you wonder why you ever doubted that there was a God. How Bunt had made it home in his condition last night was a total mystery. If he was like a cat, and had nine lives, he had definitely just used one of them up.

Bunt was not inherently a religious man, however. He choose not to dwell on the divine nature of his good fortune.

He got out of his car, holding all of the stuff he had taken with him close to his chest, trying to make the hot molasses sitting in his skull slide away from his eye sockets and the other most tender parts of his brain.

He unlocked his door, and went inside his apartment. It was mercifully shady and dark inside.

Bunt dropped all of his stuff on his living room table, and walked into the bedroom. Oddly enough, he didn't look so bad. His clothes had the casual, slightly-disheveled look of a beach-lover. His hair had formed a bizarre and somewhat appealing new shape-- with waves and ridges like the movie stars had. His face was clear, and a little tanned from the sunlight that must have come in through his windshield.

The virtual molasses in his brain, however, still burned awfully, and made it hard to move around. It flared up a little, causing him to wince-- which brought the pain directly into his eye sockets-- the sensitive parts.

Suddenly, Bunt had to loose his bowels. While his exterior seemed dry and somehow "sun-baked", as though he couldn't sweat a drop, even if he wanted to, his insides, apparently, were quite fluid, and somewhat toxic.

After Bunt had finished moving his bowels, he noticed that the explosion that had cleared his intestines had splattered all over most of the toilet seat and even the sides of the toilet.

Bunt cursed. he got down on his hands and knees, with toilet paper wadded up in his right hand, and started to scrub the crap off of the toilet. His head actually began to clear a little, and he was left with a light, almost euphoric feeling. He felt like this would be a good day to forget about everything important and just fly a kite.

However, Bunt realized, this was not to be. He stood in the shade of his blind-concealed living room and began to grapple with the idea of what to do next.

Turner was still his mark, and Gellarty had hired him, and paid him \$1000 of the total \$5000 he was due when he found Scott Turner, just to find the man and to take Gellarty to him.

Bunt's best leads-- his contact in Labyrintspel, and the address Mr. Garde had given him, turned out to be dead ends. Worse, he now had gotten involved with the F.B.I.. Who knows? thought Bunt. Right now his apartment might even be bugged. It's possible that he was followed to The Shark last night, and, from now on, he might be followed anywhere he went.

He had just lost all of his direct leads to Turner, he realized. He knew what he looked like, some of the things he did and liked to talk about, where he used to work, where he might have lived once, and that was about it.

Why, wondered Bunt, was Turner wrapped up with the F.B.I.? Sometimes, he realized, criminals the feds are hunting become protected, in a way. If the feds go undercover to catch, for example, a drug dealer, and someone comes around to his house looking for him, there is a good chance they will nab that person and start asking them questions, to see if they are involved with the criminal's illegal activities, or to stop them from blowing the feds' cover. Bunt remembered that one of the women he had talked to on the telephone had said that Turner had given her ecstasy, so she would have a better time when he took her out dancing.

However, remembered Bunt, the woman had asked him not to look into this aspect of Turner's life, and had been certain that he was not heavily involved with drugs.

Could she have been lying, just to cover Turner's ass? It was possible, realized Bunt, that Turner was such a charmer and a smoothie that he was able to get women to lie for him.

That would explain both his apparent wealth and his involvement with the F.B.I.. A major drug dealer would have been able to afford a beautiful car and expensive dates, very easily. He would have refused to give people too much information about himself, too, and would have done so quite instinctively-- in order to prevent people from sending the police after him-- particularly in order to prevent people from breaking into his home and searching it.

Maybe Turner was part of a huge ecstasy ring; "Forward Thinking Enterprises" had been a cover for a drug smuggling operation, and Mr. Garde had known about it all. Maybe Mr. Garde had even been getting a cut of the profits.

Turner had quit when Forward Thinking Enterprises was about to become a legitimate operation, Labyrintspel, and had asked Mr. Garde to send anyone who came looking for him to his house in Los Angeles.

If that was the case, however, realized Bunt-- the F.B.I. wouldn't have been waiting for him at Turner's dummy address-- Turner and his thugs would have. Maybe the F.B.I. was hot on Turner's tail, and had chased him out of his house. If they hadn't, realized Bunt, with a sudden feeling of fear and awe, he might have been killed last night by Turner's men.

Bunt didn't trust drug dealers, not at all. Even Duffy, an experienced police officer, wasn't allowed to handle the bigger narcotics cases. He had a sudden urge to call Gellarty, just to make sure she was all right. Hopefully, Turner hadn't sent his men out to kill or kidnap her.

Bunt dialed Gellarty's number. She answered almost immediately. Bunt breathed a huge sigh of relief, and said-- Sean! Sean Gellarty! You're O.K.!

Gellarty sounded annoyed. Of course I am, Mr Sidecull, she said. What's the big deal?

Bunt's happiness deflated like a gouged tire. He felt a familiar heaviness come over him as he realized what he had to tell Gellarty about Turner.

I have some bad news, said Bunt.

Is Scott dead? asked Gellarty-- suddenly sounding quite worried.

No, said Bunt-- it's not that. It's bad, though. Scott Turner is wrapped up with the F.B.I..

The F.B.I., said Gellarty? That's very strange. . . are you sure?

Bunt asked Gellarty if she had ever seen Bunt meet with any strange men or women, or if he had ever peeled off suddenly from a date or a night over at her house.

Gellarty said that he hadn't done either of those things. She just couldn't picture him getting wrapped up with the F.B.I., either. He seemed too clean-- maybe even too honest.

Bunt told Gellarty that when he had followed the lead he had gotten from Turner's old job to what was, presumably, his old address, he had found a bunch of Federal Agents who had tied him up and questioned him about what he knew about Turner.

Gellarty said-- Turner wasn't there? You didn't see him?

No, said Bunt. He wasn't there-- Bunt hadn't seen him.

Gellarty cursed. She told Bunt that she still wanted to find Turner, and that he had better stay on the case, if he wanted the rest of his \$4000.

Bunt felt next to tears because of her crassness, but understood, in a way, how clients could be. He said that he was worried that Turner was involved with something like a big time narcotics ring, and that the F.B.I. was looking for him. He warned her to stay away from anyplace Turner used to take her, and not to talk to him or anyone who claimed to know him or to be looking for him on the telephone, except for Bunt himself.

Gellarty said nothing for a moment. Then, she said-- whatever, Mr. Sidecull-- just stay on the case, and find Scott for me. Then you'll get your commission.

Bunt choked down his mounting anger and said, I will keep trying, Ms. Gellarty.

He hung up the phone.

Bunt felt upset and a little shocked. He had expected Gellarty to feel the way he felt about Turner-- that he really was a great risk to himself and to Gellarty both. She didn't seem willing to empathize with him at all-- in fact, she stubbornly stuck with her belief that Turner was a nice guy who had never gotten involved with drugs or anything like them.

Gellarty didn't seem to care that Bunt had gone all the way to Los Angeles and had been tied up by F.B.I. agents and questioned. She cared about getting Turner back, and that was all that she cared about.

Bunt couldn't decide what to do next. If Turner was involved with drugs, then even Duffy couldn't help him-- he wasn't allowed on most of those cases.

Bunt decided to call Duffy anyway. He asked Duffy to meet him for lunch at the Chinese restaurant that they always met at the bottom of the hill in Chinatown.

Bunt pulled into a spot not far from the restaurant.

It was a cloudy, moist day-- the tropical skies seemed to want to reach out and embrace Bunt and all of San Francisco, and to say that last night had never happened.

But it had.

Bunt found Duffy at a table in the center of the restaurant. He was in uniform-- and had several hours to go today before he could leave his job.

Duffy hadn't ordered yet. He was sipping on a glass of water.

What happened to you, asked Duffy.

What do you mean, answered Bunt.

You have red eyes, said Duffy-- and there's something stuck on your shirt tail.

Bunt said his eyes were red because he had been drinking the night before. In Los Angeles. He said he didn't know about his shirttail-- and then his brow furrowed.

Shirttail, he thought. Shirttail. Shirt-tail. Tail. Shirts Tailing Me-- What If They Are?

Bunt looked around the restaurant.

There were two men just then sitting by the window who looked a little different from the rest of the clientele. Too well-dressed, thought Bunt. Maybe too Los Angeles.

Bunt cursed to himself. Damn-- he thought-- it's the F.B.I.. One of those guys even has sunglasses on, just like in the movies.

Bunt smiled at Duffy and squeezed his shoulder thankfully. He asked him to come with him-- there was something he had to see.

Duffy followed Bunt out of the restaurant. They started walking up the hill. Bunt and Duffy made some brisk small talk-- they talked about Duffy's wife a little and their upcoming vacation.

Duffy said that his wife was very grateful for the gift Bunt had given them for their upcoming vacation.

Duffy kept looking at his watch. He told Bunt he had about fifteen minutes left of his lunch break.

Bunt picked up his pace, and Duffy matched his stride.

Bunt led Duffy into his office building. From the lobby, he looked out of a window and down the hill. One of the two men from the restaurant was halfway up the hill. He was looking around anxiously.

Bunt pulled Duffy quickly into the emergency stairwell, and led him up to his office. The two men went into Bunt's office, and Bunt locked the door behind him. The shades were already drawn.

The feds? asked Duffy.

Bunt said, yes-- the feds. He told Duffy quickly about his trip to Los Angeles and the questioning he had received in the basement of what was supposed to have been Turner's house.

Duffy seemed intrigued, and somewhat frightened, as well.

Bunt asked Duffy to check into any narcotics cases dated after December 1998, and to look, in particular, for any mention of Scott Turner, or for any wanted man fitting Turner's description: medium height, blonde hair, blue eyes, pale complexion.

Duffy said he would try to look through the open narcotics files. He might have to wait for a distraction in the office, or create one himself, but he would try.

Chapter 8

Bunt thanked Duffy. He pointed out that he and Gellarty might both be in danger, and that they owed him one. He also told Duffy that if any F.B.I. agents started to bother him on his way out, to just show his badge right away, and explain that he was Bunt's friend, and that they often had lunch together.

Duffy agreed.

Bunt led Duffy back down the emergency stairs, and let him out of the back of the office building, showing him an alley he could take down the hill-- where he could turn right and then right again and make his way back to his car.

Duffy and Bunt shook hands. Duffy started down the alleyway. Bunt watched the retreating back of one of his best friends ever, 2nd Lieutenant Duffy of the San Francisco Police Force.

He sighed, and looked at the all-embracing sky. It enclosed San Francisco like the ancient goddess Nut, and made Bunt feel at home.

Bunt walked back up the stairwell and into his office. He sat down at his desk. He looked at his desk. He looked at his clock, his envelope opener holder, and his ball-point pen. Over and

over again.

He had some time to kill.

About 1 and 1/2 hours later, the telephone rang in Bunt's office. He picked up the telephone. It was Gellarty.

She sounded excited.

Mr. Sidecull! She said-- you have to see this! Are you near a television set?

Bunt said that he wasn't, but that there was an old set in the lobby of his building.

Go to the lobby and turn it on to Channel 5-- and hurry! She said. I will wait for you to get back on the phone.

Bunt dropped the phone and ran down the stairs. He turned on the lobby television set to Channel 5.

Channel 5 was broadcasting a news update. Bunt saw a crowd of people. He focused on the crowd, and was able to make out, pretty clearly, a medium height, blond man with blue eyes, in a light tan suit, struggling with a reporter, and trying to get loose of him.

It had to be Turner! realized Bunt. And really, he didn't look like Bunt had expected-- he was handsome, he supposed-- but looked more Andrew McCarthy-an than Ike Turner-ish.

Turner broke free of the reporter, and hurried out of the camera's view.

Bunt looked at the center of the crowd. They were surrounding something-- or someone.

The reporter holding the camera moved closer to the center of the crowd and aimed the camera at the ground.

A pretty woman, aged 32 or so, with blond hair and a nice, floral-patterned dress, was lying on the ground. There were three paramedics surrounding her.

Bunt turned up the volume.

“ . . . one Veval Hamm passed out today near the Seaside Mall. Paramedics' attempts to revive her were unsuccessful. One Paramedic said that she seems to have choked on something, and to have died quite suddenly. Passersby noticed nothing until she collapsed outright. They claimed that she was alone. . . ”

The broadcaster summarized her report, and segued back to Channel 5's regular

programming.

Bunt had finally gotten a look at Scott Turner. He hoped that Gellarty had a VCR. . .

Bunt ran back up the stairs, a series of fragmented thoughts running through his mind, including-- poor Veval Hamm! and, was she his most recent victim? and, absurdly-- would Gellarty be mad enough at Turner now to become Bunt's woman?

Bunt picked up the phone. Ms. Gellarty? he said.

Yes! Said Sean Gellarty. That was him! Did you see? she said. . . that man in the tan suit. . .

I saw him, said Bunt. Don't worry. Ms. Gellarty, said Bunt-- do you have a VCR? Did you tape the broadcast?

She said that she had turned on her VCR and hit "record" as soon as she had recognized Scott-- she had hit "record" right away. She didn't give a crap what she had taped over.

Bunt told Gellarty to watch the 5 O' clock news and the 10:30 news on Channel 5 that night, and to tape both broadcasts in their entirety.

Bunt said that he would flip between Channels 2 and 4 at his apartment, and that he would stop by her place around 11:15 PM..

Gellarty paused for a moment, and then said, O.K. Mr. Sidecull. Will do.

Bunt said that these tapes could help him catch Mr. Turner, they really could-- and that he wanted her to be pleased-- this could break the case wide open!

She said, Great, Mr. Sidecull!, sounding more excited than he had ever heard her sound. I will see you tonight.

Thanks, Sean, said Bunt.

He hung up the phone.

Bunt prepared to watch the news. He was holding a half-eaten hot dog in one hand, but it didn't seem to matter-- not for a half an hour. He flipped feverishly from stations 2 to 4 with his right hand, his VCR recording the whole time.

Bunt managed to catch all but the first second or so of both channels' coverage of Veval Hamm's death. All of the 5 O'clock coverage was very similar to Channel 5's coverage from earlier in the day. Channel 2 was positioned a little closer to Ms. Hamm when they taped, and the segment showing Turner was clearer and larger. Channel 4 did not catch Turner at all, but,

rather, showed the scene from a slightly different angle.

Bunt turned off the television set, once he was sure that no repeat broadcasts were featured in the same half-hour. He finished his hot dog, barely tasting it.

Bunt spent the next three hours agonizing over his meeting with Gellarty. He had never been to her house, and, in fact, had only really seen her once-- at the cafe. He had communicated with her almost exclusively by phone ever since.

Bunt took a long, hot shower, remembering to scrub the very bottoms of his feet. He tried on various outfits-- even, half-jokingly, his security guard top, which seemed to hide his paunch very well. He was somewhat reluctant to take off the uniform shirt and jacket, but realized that Gellarty would have thought his outfit very unusual had he worn it to her house.

Bunt finally settled on a pair of loose, black, cotton slacks, which were pleated like Dockers to hide his waistline, and a comfortable rayon shirt, white, with short sleeves. He shaved himself, and then, in a retentive fit, shaved himself again, paying careful attention to the stubble on his neck and on the back of his neck, beneath his hairline. He considered shaving his back, but could not hope that Gellarty would see him with his shirt off that evening.

Bunt's neck stung quite sharply when he put his cologne on. He looked in the mirror, and saw that his neck had become slightly reddened where he had shaved it too violently. He could even see a few of his neck pores standing out-- they were filled with little red dots of blood.

When you look at a person's face on tv, you do not see their pores. Sometimes, a close up for a Stridex ad or such will show you a teenager's zit-ridden forehead-- Bunt couldn't even tell if those were real.

People like Clint Eastwood or Paul Hogan had rugged, seamed faces that were usually shiny with sweat or oil, and Bunt figured that their pores were as large and ugly as his-- although they never showed you those kinds of details on TV.

Most men on TV, however-- Dolph Lundgren, Jean Claude Van Damme, and so on-- had perfect skin, and even when they sweated, they never seemed to get zits or blackheads. Maybe they lived in extremely cool, air-conditioned houses, or, maybe their genes were descended from those of Nordic pirates whose smooth, pale skin and blond hair was perfect, clean and beautiful-- untouched and unmarred by long afternoons spent in super-hot, humid California offices or cars with crappy air conditioning systems.

Bunt slathered on a great deal of deodorant, and agonized for a few moments over the fact that a man's sense of smell is less sensitive than that of a woman. What that meant, realized Bunt, was that men might actually smell like stale sweat, thinking that their deodorant and cologne covered the smell completely, while, the whole time, women could smell some nasty, masculine smell. Of course, most women, like Gellarty, would probably be too polite to mention such a thing.

Maybe they should mention things like that, thought Bunt. If a woman was to say to him, Eew! You stink, Bunt!-- he would have been a little miffed, but, at least, would have known that he stank and she was willing to admit it.

Bunt could use a woman with a little honesty. The thought of a woman who was too polite to tell Bunt intimate things like that would make him jumpy and nervous. Maybe he would be able to tell that something was bothering her, but wouldn't be able to figure out what it was.

Some women would never tell men what was bothering them, even if their boyfriends or husbands asked them quite directly what was the problem.

Bunt could remember a time, when he was dating Rose, that he felt that she really loved him. They had reached that point in their relationship where there was true love. Bunt had felt so valued then. He was comfortable, for example, taking his shirt off in front of her. The chest she saw then was, simply, her boyfriend's chest-- the boyfriend she loved. It didn't matter if it had too much hair or was paunchy-- she loved him no matter what his chest looked like.

But, there were things Bunt wouldn't do himself. He had watched an episode of a sitcom starring Paul Reiser and Helen Hunt, for example, in which the Helen Hunt character was pregnant, and Paul Reiser had asked her if he could sleep with her anyway. She let him do it. Bunt imagined, with a shiver, something dilated or overextended in Helen Hunt that shouldn't have been invaded.

These kinds of sexual or intimate olympics made Bunt feel a little queasy. So, how could he expect Gellarty to overlook any of his mysterious masculine odors?

In fact, what if hitting on Gellarty was like a taboo? She was, he knew, still in love with Scott Turner. Maybe it was like she was Helen Hunt, with a very special baby, per se, in her stomach, that she was feeding with her blood and oxygen and food, and if Bunt was to try to hit on her, it would be like Paul Reiser sleeping with Helen Hunt even though she was nine months pregnant.

Damn, he thought.

Gellarty, in fact, had been cold with Bunt on the phone yesterday. She hadn't been concerned with his run-in with the F.B.I., and she didn't seem to care whether or not Scott Turner was involved with a narcotics ring. She still loved Turner, and could have cared less about Bunt.

So, how could Bunt expect Gellarty to become interested in him? Furthermore, how could Bunt expect Gellarty to become like Rose was for him-- not caring what his paunch looked like when his shirt was off, how he smelled, and such?

Bunt snapped out of his musings. He had been looking in the mirror the whole time without seeing himself. He could now. He looked really tired, actually, and somewhat sad. He was on the verge of breaking the Turner case wide open, but he looked like someone had just shot his

boyhood pet and dragged its corpse away.

In fact, Bunt felt, suddenly, somewhat doomed, like a man condemned never to marry-- like some Greek reveler, trapped on a vase, his arms painfully outstretched, forever reaching for someone who he would never be able to touch.

Bunt's doomed feeling persisted for the rest of the early evening, and was only partially abated by the shallow excitement he felt when he turned on the 10:30 news and flipped back and forth between channels 2 and 4, looking for an image of Scott Turner.

The 10:30 news did not cover the Veval Hamm incident at all. In San Francisco, an accidental death was no big deal, realized Bunt. What a huge, crazy city.

He sighed heavily, collected his video tape, unplugged his VCR, and took all of this paraphernalia plus a blank tape and a line splitter out to his brown Ford.

He started his car, and headed for Sean Gellarty's house.

Agent Greg Torke flipped off his television set and cursed under his breath. He turned to the red haired agent on his left and told him to get the chief of the phone and to tell him that Turner had been on Channels 2 and 5 at 5 O'clock, but not at 10:30 PM..

Agent Torke opened up a locked desk drawer with a key, and took out several newspaper articles. He flipped through the articles.

Chapter 9

The first article was headlined: "Jim Sands To Stand Trial Today For Deacon Clan Murders". Agent Torke scanned the article, and read a detail or two about a series of murders in New York in 1997 and early 1998. Five local aldermen had been killed, each by gunshot, during this 10 month period. These killings had taken place just before local elections. At least three of the aldermen had been opposed by politicians who had definite ties with the Deacon Clan-- a group of private investors who had obtained a considerable amount of clout in several local utility companies-- seemingly in an effort to "buy out" the electric, water, and gas utility companies of New York. These connections led back to the leader of the Deacon Clan-- its lynchpin, Jim Sands.

Agent Torke closed his eyes and wondered-- a monopoly on local utilities in New York! What if the three companies had been undermined by the Deacon Clan, and had simultaneously raised the price of all local utilities? If most of the local aldermen had supported the Deacon Clan, and, had, indeed, helped them to usurp the utilities, then any public outcry could have been tempered by the aldermanic support of the Clan and their holdings.

Not to mention the ominous possibility of Clan-imposed (faux) “strikes” or shutdowns / blackouts-- if the Deacons had been able to hire representatives who could have demanded money as ransom from the local government in order to end any shutdowns and blackouts, or, even, funneled money from emergency Federal grants meant to assuage the “strikers”, the Deacons could have made millions of dollars.

Agent Torke looked at the next article. It was titled: “Anonymous Witness To Testify Against Jim Sands In Deacon Trial“. The article mentioned that an anonymous witness, a previous member of the Deacon Clan, had turned himself in to the New York police, and had agreed to testify against Jim Sands concerning the aldermanic murders, and the Clan’s plans to take over New York’s utility companies.

The third article said, “Anonymous Witness Provides Testimony That Topples Sands“. Agent Torke skimmed the article. The anonymous witness, it said, had provided enough incriminating evidence to implicate Jim Sands for the aldermanic murders, and had, in fact, given the New York police enough information to arrest all of the remaining members of the Deacon Clan.

The witness, the article said, would remain anonymous, and would immediately be placed under Federal Protection and relocated to an undisclosed location, in accordance with the Federal Witness Protection Plan.

Agent Torke reached into the open drawer and pulled out 2 pictures. One picture showed a medium height, somewhat paunchy man with dark hair and blue eyes. The second picture showed a thin, medium-height man with blue eyes. The men looked, at first, completely different. But, Agent Torke had to admit, if a person looked closely and for some time at the two photographs, he or she would be able to tell that the two men were the same person.

Agent Torke fingered a folder in the right side of the drawer. It was labeled, “Scott Krull“. Inside the folder, remembered Agent Torke, was a list of employers, an automobile insurance form, some receipts for transfers made from Federal bank accounts to accounts belonging to Scott Krull, A business card belonging to one “George Garde”, and several other forms and documents.

Agent Torke sighed, and ran his hands through his hair somewhat anxiously. He placed a videotape in the drawer. It was a brand new tape. The tape was labeled: Scott Krull / Local San Francisco Newscasts 8/12/2001. He closed the drawer and locked it.

Agent Torke had hoped he wouldn’t have to add anything to that drawer for awhile. He had thought that everything was going well for Scott. The Federal Government had promised to relocate Scott after he had taken the stand against Jim Sands and the rest of the Deacon Clan in 1998. Agent Torke had been placed in charge of his relocation and his continued support and protection.

It wasn’t Agent Torke’s fault that Veval Hamm had died earlier that day. It probably wasn’t

Scott's fault, either. Apparently, the woman had choked on something, and had died very quickly. Unfortunately, she had had the bad graces to die on a public sidewalk in the middle of a crowd on a sunny day-- and, for some reason, Scott had had to be there.

Agent Torke thought about Bunt "Smith." He had been the first person to track Scott to his fake address. Mr. Garde, who Greg had placed at Labyrinthspel-- an F.B.I. agent who had also been trained to be a personnel manager-- had been instructed to send anyone asking for Scott to the Mirage Lane address, whether they had come asking about him before or after his time spent there as an employee.

Torke had done some checking into Mr. Smith's identity, and had come up with some disturbing details. Apparently, there was no Bunt "Smith" currently living in San Francisco. However, a man claiming to be "Bunt Smith" had been hired recently by Mr. Peters of Labyrinthspel as a security guard; he was the man who had questioned George Garde about Scott. Mr. "Smith" abandoned his job without notice, and Mr. Peters and Mr. Garde had discussed various reasons as to why this might have been the case-- including several somewhat ominous possible reasons involving corporate or criminal espionage.

The loose tail Agent Torke had assigned to Bunt "Smith" turned up something worse. "Smith's" license plates had been registered to one "Bunt Sidecull". Furthermore, "Smith" had been followed to an address in San Francisco that was leased to a man named "Bunt Sidecull"-- a private detective. Two of Torke's agents had followed Mr. "Smith" to a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown, where he had met with one 2nd Lieutenant Duffy of the San Francisco Police Department.

One of the two agents had followed "Smith" and Duffy to an office building, which contained several offices, including a telemarketers' firm, an insurance office, a real estate agency-- and, a business called, "Sidecull Investigations." A private detective agency.

Agent Torke figured out right away that Bunt Sidecull wasn't married to anyone named Gellarty. His reason for trying to find Scott? That was the real question.

It was possible that Scott had done something that bothered someone enough to hire a private detective to try to find him. Maybe he had slept with someone's wife, or threatened someone verbally, or something.

That didn't sound like Scott, though. He had been involved with the Deacon Clan, it was true, but had heroically volunteered to testify against Jim Sands. Aside from the potentially criminal affiliation he had had with the Deacons, he had had no previous criminal record.

Then again, sometimes people change their characters along with their lifestyles when they relocate. Agent Torke had handled a case back in 1993 of a man who had also been relocated. Before being relocated the guy had been a real womanizer-- he had had a chain of girlfriends, sometimes several at once, for years. Once he was relocated to Los Angeles, the man had denounced his previous sexual liaisons, and had vowed to begin a life of celibacy. As far as Greg

knew, the guy was still celibate.

Maybe Scott had turned over a new leaf-- to find it had been a nasty, moldy one.

There was another possible reason that Bunt Sidecull had been looking for Scott. It might be that the Deacon Clan had managed to track Scott down and somehow to find him in his new home with his blond hair and now-skinny body. How they could have found Scott all the way in San Francisco, with a new name and a completely different appearance baffled Greg. Worse-- it frightened him.

The Deacons had been a powerful bunch of people. They had almost succeeded in taking over all three major New York utilities-- a scam no one since the Communist Dictators of Europe had pulled off. If any of the remaining Deacons tracked Scott to San Francisco, then two bad things were almost certain to happen.

Number One: Scott would be killed. Very soon.

Number Two: Greg would lose his job.

Bunt Sidecull had seemed like a normal kind of guy. Maybe a little clumsier and more nervous than most people, but, for the most part, normal. Then again, he had had the caninness to drive away that night at Mirage Lane to the South, so that Torke and his men presumably wouldn't be able to see his car and his license plates. Actually, Torke had had a security camera recording pretty much half of the block the whole time, so Sidecull had been recorded getting into his Brown Ford Fairmont with its license plates registered to "Bunt Sidecull", anyway.

A woman might have hired Bunt Sidecull, thought Agent Torke, to track down Scott. Today, Scott had been on his way to meet a woman, hadn't he? A Ms. Veval Hamm? Well, thought Greg, maybe there really was a Gellarty, only she hadn't married Bunt Sidecull-- she had been in love with Scott. Then, maybe he had left her to go out with Ms. Hamm. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, thought Agent Torke.

Agent Torke put his hand on his forehead and thought for a moment. Then, he sighed.

There was only one thing to do, he realized.

It was the one thing that Federal Agents didn't like to do when it came to relocated citizens placed under their protection.

Agent Torke would have to track Scott down-- and to talk to him about Bunt, Hamm and Gellarty.

Bunt rang the doorbell at Gellarty's place. He was holding a VCR under one arm, and some VCR tapes and a line splitter in his other hand. His cologne was really quite powerful that

evening, and if Bunt had had that feminine sensitivity for smells that he had been worrying about earlier, he would have taken another shower, with lots of soap, to wash most of the cologne off of his body.

Gellarty answered the doorbell right away. She was wearing a designer sweatsuit, navy blue, that showed no cleavage, and, really, no body at all. A man could have worn that suit, thought Bunt, and he would have looked pretty much the same way.

Gellarty was, understandably, quite excited. She shook Bunt's hand with one hand and waved a VCR tape in her other hand-- rather than saying hello, she said, quite simply-- I've got Scott!

Bunt said that that was great. He seemed to be on the verge of saying something else, but his face kind of collapsed for a moment, his cheeks going slack and then, even, somewhat hollow. He went into Gellarty's place without a word and started to get down to business.

Where is your VCR, asked Bunt?

In the living room, said Gellarty. Follow me.

She led Bunt through an open doorway and into a nicely decorated living room, with a sofa, pseudo-expensive paintings on the wall, a nice, black-painted wooden table, and a television stand with a VCR and a television on it.

Bunt set his VCR on the floor next to the television stand. He plugged a cable into the back of her VCR from his VCR, and another cable from her VCR to a line splitter, which divided the cable into 2 lines. One cable he plugged into the back of his VCR. The other cable he plugged into Gellarty's television antenna.

Finally, he plugged the his VCR's power cord into an extension cord that Gellarty had, conveniently, near the television already.

Bunt asked Gellarty to have a seat, please, and to hand him her remote control. He asked her to put her tape of the Turner newscasts in her VCR, and to rewind or fast-forward her tape until it was just before the beginning of the broadcasts that featured Turner.

Gellarty did this with much enthusiasm. In about five minutes, Bunt was looking at the special report that had been on Channel 5 the previous afternoon. He checked his blank tape to be sure it was rewound, pressed "record" for a moment to advance the tape past the runner, and pressed "pause".

Bunt then asked Gellarty for her remote control. He pressed "play" on her VCR and "record" on his VCR at the same time. The television set displayed that afternoon's report, almost in entirety-- Gellarty had been quick to catch the report on her VCR.

There was Scott Turner, at the edge of the screen, yet quite identifiable by now, with his tan

suit, pale skin, and skinny arms grappling with a reporter and trying to get free of him. Scott Turner broke free of the reporter and left the screen, and then, the camera panned forward and down to show the deceased Veval Hamm lying on her back in a pretty flower dress, surrounded by paramedics, reporters and passersby.

The special report repeated this footage twice-- that must have been how Bunt had been able to catch the report on the television set in the lobby of his office building.

The footage ended with a summary and a segue.

Bunt hit "stop" on his VCR, and cued up Gellarty's tape for the 5 O' Clock broadcast featuring Turner. He pressed "record" when the tape was all cued up. The 5 O' Clock report was almost identical to the afternoon's special report, except that the footage was featured only once. Bunt recorded the 5 O' Clock footage onto his VCR tape, and then hit the "stop" button on both VCRs..

He turned to Gellarty. She was sitting on the edge of her sofa, leaning forward-- her eyes seeming to see only the television. She had a look that was both empty and hopeful, and Bunt felt immediately sorry for her. She looked just like he must have when he was sitting in his car many years ago in front of Rose's apartment, waiting with an absurd excitement for her to return.

He didn't know quite what to say.

Gellarty snapped out of it. She said, with a great deal of animation, that that was definitely Scott, and he looked just the way he had when she was dating him. What he was doing near Veval Hamm when she had died she did not know-- but she said she figured Hamm was one of Scott's old friends from Labyrinth or something.

Gellarty looked at Bunt with a gaze that was so full of nervous excitement that it hardly seemed able to fix on his face.

Bunt said, Ms. Gellarty-- that may be. Let's just get this tape together, and then I will take it to my contact at the San Francisco Police Force. He is very reliable, and he will be able to pass the tape around to the entire precinct, and maybe to several other precincts in San Francisco and California at large.

Ms. Gellarty said that there wasn't any coverage on at 10:30 PM on Channel 5. She looked a little upset. Will that be enough to find Turner?

Bunt said that Channels 2 and 4 had coverage of the incident, and that Channel 2's coverage had also featured an image of Turner, much like Channel 5's had. He said that a photo-quality image was often good enough for a make, and would, at the very least, allow the entire state of California to be on the lookout for Turner. Unless Turner stayed in his place for a long, long time, and never came out-- or, unless he left California right away, and, eventually, the United States-- he would probably be spotted pretty quickly.

Gellarty squealed a little, and gave Bunt a hug. Bunt would have been very happy at that moment, but her squeal had been, really, quite unbecoming. He patted her on the back in a paternal way, and pushed her gently away from him.

Bunt looked out of Gellarty's living room for a minute at the dark, vast, starry sky, until he felt his eyes go unfocused.

He snapped himself back into focus, and put his tape of Channel 2 and 4's 5 O' Clock broadcasts into Gellarty's VCR. He recorded the broadcasts onto his tape, including Channel 4's broadcast, just for good measure.

Bunt turned off Gellarty's VCR and television. He collected his two tapes-- the tape with the unedited footage from that night's 5 O' Clock broadcasts of Channels 2 and 4, and the new tape, with 4 broadcasts of pretty much the same footage-- one being the special report from Channel 5 that afternoon, and 3 of the 4 featuring images of Scott Turner struggling to get free of a reporter from one angle or another.

He unhooked his VCR, and plugged Gellarty's VCR back into the antenna without Bunt's line splitter.

Bunt put all of his tapes and equipment into a pile. He looked up to see where Gellarty was, and couldn't find her.

He heard a noise from the kitchen.

Bunt walked gingerly into the kitchen. Gellarty was at her kitchen counter putting ice cubes into a glass. One glass.

He said, Ms. Gellarty?

She said, Yes, not turning around.

I am going to leave now. I will let myself out. I will call you as soon as I hear anything from the police.

Gellarty turned around. She was drinking gulps of iced tea from a tall glass, her teeth slightly parted; between gulps, she was aspirating sexily just like she had the first day he had met her.

She said, O.K. Mr. Sidecull, somewhat blandly-- and then, with some excitement-- Call me as soon as they find him!

I will, said Bunt.

He left Gellarty in the kitchen, picked up his VCR, tapes, and line splitter, and left Gellarty's

place.

Bunt felt a heaviness descending on him , and a somewhat wild emptiness, that rivaled the mood that had hit him in Los Angeles when he had decided to get drunk at The Shark.

And, unlike the bartender there, Gellarty hadn't even offered him a drink.

Agent Greg Torke sat behind the wheel of a Black 2001 Cadillac Sedan-- a company car. His mirrored windows were rolled up, reflecting, from the outside, images of beautiful, tanned rollerbladers and men and women bound for the beach. Torke's engine was idling, and his air conditioning was on. The radio played music from a classical station very softly.

To Agent Torke's right, in the passenger seat, sat Scott Krull.

Scott was looking immaculate, in a white suit, his blond hair perfectly combed and lightly gelled.

Agent Torke told Scott that he had seen him on the news the previous day, trying to get away from a dead woman-- one Veval Hamm.

Scott said that was a shame.

Agent Torke said that most of San Francisco had also seen Scott trying to get away from Ms. Hamm.

Scott said nothing.

Greg Torke turned towards Scott and grabbed him by the collar of his white cotton shirt. He held his eyes to his own, and looked deeply in them, searchingly, for a moment.

Scott's eyes stared back a clear, calm, pale blue.

Do you value your life, godammit? said Torke-- DO YOU?

Scott blinked in surprise.

Of course I do, Greg. That's why I am here in San Francisco, right?

Agent Torke slammed his hand on his steering wheel, producing a very loud THUD. He was panting. He paused for a moment, until his breathing slowed down.

Scott-- he said. I had to pass tapes of that broadcast and 2 others on to my chief. It's my job to take care of you, Scott. I have already had one man asking around for you. If he is with the Deacons, or, if the Deacons start looking for you-- you will probably die. Do you understand

me?

Scott blinked again and looked out of the window and at the beach for a moment.

Who was looking for me? he asked.

A man named Sidecull, said Agent Torke. A private detective. Apparently, some woman named "Gellarty" hired him to find you. He tracked you all the way down to the house at Mirage Lane.

Scott was starting to look a little nervous. He said, Gellarty? trying to pretend that he did not recognize her name.

Greg, however, was an F.B.I. agent, and was not stupid. He could tell that Scott knew or had known a woman named Gellarty.

How did you know Ms Gellarty? asked Agent Torke.

Well, I. . . Scott sounded flustered.

Greg suddenly slapped Scott in the face. Scott grunted in surprise, and put his hand to his cheek.

HOW DID YOU KNOW HER?

Scott sighed, and something seemed to snap inside of him.

Greg, I dated her. She was my girlfriend.

For how long, said Agent Torke?

For about 2 months, he said.

Did she break up with you?

Scott paused for a moment, then felt his rapidly purpling cheek.

No, he said, I broke up with her.

Under what terms, said Agent Torke.

We were about to get married.

Agent Torke looked thoughtful for a moment, and then seemed to be on the verge of making an important conclusion.

And how about Veval Hamm, asked Agent Torke.

We were dating, said Scott. I was going to meet her yesterday near the mall.

For how long were you dating, asked Agent Torke?

For a few weeks, Greg, said Scott.

Agent Torke looked at Scott. He was no longer the paunchy, dark-haired New York businessman he used to be. He looked, in fact, a lot like a model from GQ, complete with expensive clothes, a thin, wiry body, and blond hair that was real enough and nice enough to fool a hairdresser. All compliments of the F.B.I., thought Greg.

How many women have you dated in the past 2 years? asked Greg.

Scott said nothing.

Agent Torke started to very visibly polish the ring on his right hand, which was clenched into an ever tightening fist.

Scott said, stuttering a little-- about 10. 10 women.

He looked at Greg with a mixture of pride and fear.

He leaned close to Agent Torke, and said-- *I had sex with them. Each and every one. Many times. I had sex with them until they begged me to marry them. Then I left them. I left them each and every one.*

Agent Torke looked like he was about to make a terrible connection-- like he was holding two opposite-charged wires very closely together with trembling hands-- and then he just couldn't bring himself to make them touch.

He turned the radio off and paused for a moment.

He looked at Scott.

Agent Torke said, Scott-- there is nothing illegal about what you did. I can't arrest you or turn you over to the police. I just want you to understand something.

You were stupid, Scott. you had it made. We gave you a new look and a new home, and we paid your way for 3 years. You could have done anything that you wanted to do-- you were free to do almost anything.

But you decided to be stupid.

You thought you were a new man, and an untouchable one. You thought you could get away with anything you wanted to get away with-- and you ended up breaking ten women's hearts, ten innocent women-- you ended up getting a private eye on your tail-- and, you ended up showing up on local TV way too close to a girl who had just then died.

Scott, said Greg-- you are a hairsbreadth away from blowing your cover completely. If any remaining Deacons find out who and where you are, they will kill you.

Greg took a deep breath, and his eyes smiled a little at their edges. And, worse, he said-- the chief will fire me.

Tomorrow we are going to have an important meeting, you and I, with a couple of important people.

Then, you are going to go back into the Relocation Program. We are going to get you a new look. I am picturing you as an overweight Irishman in, say, Rhode Island. With a pretty tight tail of Federal Agents, too-- at least, for awhile. That's what I see.

Scott closed his eyes-- he seemed almost to stop breathing for a moment. Agent Torke was afraid he was falling asleep-- or, maybe even passing out.

Suddenly, Scott opened his eyes. He looked at Agent Torke and silently nodded. A look of deep resignation was now in his pale, now tired-looking blue eyes.

Bunt Sidecull was on his way to meet Duffy, in his old brown Ford Fairmont.

Duffy had called Bunt that morning with an update on the narcotics angle-- no wanted man fitted Turner's description closely enough to be him. Duffy said that Turner probably either wasn't involved with any big time narcotics rings, or he had yet to be connected with any.

Bunt told Duffy that he had some new evidence, and that, this time, Duffy could do some above the boards work. He was going to give Duffy some videotapes that featured images of Scott Turner, and wanted the San Francisco Police to start hunting him down. Bunt asked Duffy to try to pin the Hamm death on Turner. He wanted the police to hunt him down to question him regarding her death, and then Duffy could take Turner to him, or him to Turner, once they had exonerated him.

Bunt was excited about some of the recent developments in the case, but he still had some questions, and was, to be honest, a little less personally involved than he had been at first. Gellarty, obviously, didn't give a crap about Bunt and thought he was just another serviceman to hire, pay, and say goodbye to.

If Turner wasn't involved with a narcotics ring, then the ecstasy he had give his girlfriend

hadn't really been that big of a deal-- it had been just a mistake for Turner, rather than a criminal habit or profession.

Why, then, were the Feds interested in Turner? Why did they lead Bunt to the house at Mirage Lane, and why did they tie him up and question him?

Furthermore, what had happened in New York three Decembers ago?

Bunt parked his car in front of the Chinese restaurant. He walked in the restaurant's front door, a videotape in one hand, and looked around for Duffy. He didn't see him.

While he continued looking, two men, who must have been sitting at a table near the entrance to the restaurant, appeared at Bunt's side, and grabbed him firmly by his shoulders.

Bunt looked up, startled.

They were feds, he realized. Their clothes were a little too nice to be pedestrians', and, as always, one of them was wearing sunglasses indoors. When would they ever figure out not to do that, wondered Bunt?

The two agents ushered Bunt out of the restaurant, and forced him to get in the back seat of a shiny black Cadillac Sedan. They took his videotape and one of the agents put it in a briefcase and closed the briefcase.

A company car, thought Bunt.

The two agents got in the driver and passenger seats of the car, and they started the car's engine. A protective shield, somewhat like a cabby would have had, only without a slot for paying, separated Bunt from the 2 agents.

Air conditioning filled the back seat of the car, making Bunt shiver a little. One of Mozart's symphonies played softly in the speakers behind Bunt's head.

Bunt had a lot of questions. Was he being taken in? Were the feds arresting him for some reason? He had, he realized, broken his promise to Agent Torke, and had continued to investigate Scott Turner. Maybe Agent Torke was going to give him a talking to. He might even have to break off the case.

Of course, Bunt couldn't have asked any of these questions, because a soundproof shield prevented his voice from reaching the 2 agents. They probably wouldn't have answered Bunt's questions, anyway. Federal Agents rarely do.

The agents parked behind a car that was identical to theirs just off the San Francisco beach. The 2 agents opened the back seat door, and ushered Bunt out of the car.

The 2 agents led Bunt to a small stand of trees whose leaves were blowing like small sails in the Pacific breeze. The sound of the sea was loud but not overpowering here.

Three people joined Bunt and the 2 agents almost immediately.

Bunt recognized, with a great deal of surprise, Agent Greg Torke, Sean Gellarty-- and Scott Turner.

Bunt looked at Gellarty, but she refused to meet his gaze. She seemed upset.

Agent Torke walked up to Bunt, and shook his hand. Mr. Sidecull, he said-- we meet again.

Bunt said, Hello, Agent Torke.

Agent Torke asked the agent with the briefcase to give him the videotape. The agent handed him Bunt and Gellarty's tape of Scott Turner. Agent Torke put his finger between the exposed portion of videotape and the tape's plastic innards and pulled the tape sharply until it snapped. He tossed the broken videotape into a nearby trash can.

Agent Torke cleared his throat.

This, Mr. Sidecull, he said, gesturing towards Scott Turner, is the man you have been looking for. And, as I have already explained to Ms. Gellarty here, this is a man you will never know.

In fact, said Agent Torke, after today, neither you nor Ms. Gellarty will ever see this man again.

Bunt was about to protest, but Agent Torke held out his hand to keep him in check.

Before you start to argue, Mr. Sidecull, realize this-- Scott is a very special man. He helped us a few years ago with a very important matter, and now, we are going to protect him and keep him safe.

The Federal Witness Protection Plan! realized Bunt. That must have been what happened in New York back in 1998-- Scott testified as a key witness in some big trial, and the feds relocated him to San Francisco. . .

Agent Torke continued, breaking Bunt's rapidly developing thoughts.

Scott, however, he said, has an apology to make. It seems that he ended up using his new look and identity here in San Francisco to do a little womanizing. More than a little, actually. Isn't that right, Scott?

Bunt looked at Scott Turner with a good deal of anger. This was the man who had taken advantage of Sean Gellarty and a great many women besides-- perhaps, even, of Veval Hamm. . .

Scott looked back at Bunt Sidecull with pale blue eyes that seemed to say nary a thing. He seemed, in fact, to be miles away, like a billboard for last month's GQ.

He cleared his throat, and said, simply-- Sean, Mr. Sidecull-- I am sorry.

Scott then turned and looked at the Pacific Ocean. He seemed to become immediately lost in it-- borne away by its waves.

The 2 agents took Turner by the shoulders and led him away-- to where, Bunt did not know.

What an asshole, thought Bunt. A heroic son of a bitch.

Agent Torke said to Gellarty and Bunt-- I apologize for any confusion Scott and I may have caused over the past few weeks, and, in particular, for Scott's behavior towards you, Miss Gellarty. But, it is important for you to know that we are taking Scott away-- very far away-- and neither of you will ever see him again. We owe him this favor, you see, for the help he gave us a few years ago.

So, this is goodbye, Ms. Gellarty, and this is goodbye, Mr. Sidecull. It would be for the best that we never meet again.

Agent Torke walked down the paved beachside path to the South. Bunt watched him fade steadily away, looking strangely anomalous walking alongside the beach in his expensive black suit.

Bunt was left alone with Sean Gellarty under the stand of trees.

Gellarty looked as though a deep heaviness had come over her. Her eyes seemed far away, and her gaze kept wandering, as though she was looking for something, and just not finding it.

Or someone, thought Bunt.

Bunt moved to Gellarty's side, and tried to put his arm around her shoulders in order to comfort her.

Gellarty pushed his arm away.

She paused for a moment, and took her checkbook out of her purse. She took out a ballpoint pen, opened up her checkbook, and wrote out a check.

She said, Thank you, to Bunt in a cold voice. You found Scott for me. This is your payment. You earned it.

Gellarty looked up at Bunt and handed him the check-- but she seemed already to be a

thousand miles away.

Bunt took the check and thanked Gellarty.

Without replying, she started walking along the paved beachside path to the South.

Bunt said, suddenly-- "Don't give up, Sean! Don't give up. You'll find a better man!"

Gellarty turned back halfway around. To Bunt, she seemed to be smiling.

Gellarty turned back to the South, and Bunt watched her beautiful West Coast Gothic self slowly disappear into the distance.

Bunt looked at the check Gellarty had give him. It said \$4000, just like they had agreed. He put the check in his wallet, and started looking for a cab. Bunt was headed for the heart of San Francisco.

Bunt Sidecull stood in front of a plate glass window, intently looking at what lay behind it.

There were shoes behind the window.

Some of the shoes were brown, some were maroon, and a few were black. They were all used, but they had been polished to a high gloss, and looked very nice.

Bunt had his eye on one pair in particular-- a pair of shiny black wingtips with small, ornamental black tassles, just like the shoes his father used to wear.

Bunt opened the front door of the Turnabout shoe store and went inside.

Recent Writing Achievements

As Of 11/12/2017

2016

5/16 "Fast Food" by Thomas Park is scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", June 2016

5/17 "Customer Service" and "The Barista" are scheduled to be published in Spillwords, June 2016

5/22 "The Librarian's Song" and "The Copy Center" are scheduled to be released in Spillwords, June 2016

5/24 "Customer Service" is accepted to be published at Birdsong Publishing, in a collaborative trade paperback

5/26 "For T.S. Eliot", "To A Young Lady" and "A Wife In Politics" were accepted to be published in Spillwords.com, July 2016

5/27 "Fast Food" is elected the Poem of the Day at the "Canvas Of My Soul Public Sight" group on Google Plus

5/31 "Ode To The Modern Seafarer" by Thomas Park is scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", August 2016

6/6 A poem by Thomas is read aloud at the Scribbler's "Transformation" competition

6/7 "Poetry" by Thomas Park is scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", August 2016

6/10 Thomas' poem "Santa Cruz" is accepted into a series at Silver Birch Press called "BEACH & POOL MEMORIES"

6/13 Spillwords.com puts up a page for Thomas Park, and a series of his poems begin to show up on their website

6/14 Thomas' poem "A Love Poem" is the moderator's pick for "Poem Of The Day" at the online Google Plus "Poetry" community

6/15 "To Hamlet" and "Chicago" by Thomas Park are scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", September 2016

6/16 Thomas' poem "Away To School" is accepted into a series at Silver Birch Press called "WHEN I MOVED"

6/17 "Onkama, Michigan", "A Love Poem" and "Ottawa, Kansas" by Thomas Park are scheduled to appear in "Spillwords", September and October 2016

6/21 "Poetry Submission" and "Honeymoon In Mexico" are scheduled to appear on Spillwords.com in October 2016

6/27 "Pinball Wizard" is scheduled to appear on Spillwords.com in November 2016. Spillwords asks Thomas to submit poems for publication on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

6/30 Thomas' 2 poems about Thanksgiving and Christmas are slated to appear on Spillwords.com on or around those holidays

7/2 Spillwords magazine interviews Thomas for a new feature about poets

7/16 Birdsong Publishing features a poem by Thomas Park in their anthology, "Millennium Poets & Poems: Birdsong Anthology 2016 (Volume 1)"

7/19 Thomas' poem "If I Had A Child" is scheduled to appear in an Anthology hosted by Silver Birch Press, called "If I"

7/28 "The Silent President" is accepted to be published by Spillwords.com in November 2016

8/7 Silver Birch Press publishes "Santa Cruz"

8/20 "Grandad's Safe" is accepted to be published for a Silver Birch Press anthology entitled "Prized Possessions". Thomas Park becomes the "Spotlight Writer" at Spillwords.com .

9/23 Silver Birch Press publishes "Away To School"

9/29 Silver Birch Press agrees to feature "Knit Cap" in their anthology series-- "Me- In A Hat"

10/23 Silver Birch Press publishes "If I Had A Child" as part of their "If I" Anthology

11/9 Silver Birch Press publishes "Grandad's Safe" as part of their "Prized Possessions" Anthology

12/9 Silver Birch Press publishes "Knit Cap" as part of their "Me, In A Hat" Anthology

12/25 Spillwords.com publishes a special poem by Thomas Park called "Christmastime"

2017

2/1 Arteidolia Magazine posts "New Industrial Music", an essay about music

7/1 Arteidolia Magazine posts "A Machine Music Manifesto", an essay about music

8/8 Entropy Magazine publishes "A Poetry Of Lossy Media"-- an essay by Thomas Park about analog cassette tape music

9/5 Arteidolia Magazine posts "A Poetry Of Lossy Media"-- an essay by Thomas Park

9/14 Thomas releases his novella, "The Hunt For Scott Turner", on archive.org in the Community Texts collection

11/6 Thomas posts approximately the first 5 weeks of his blog, "A Schizophrenic Perspective", in the Community Texts collection at Archive.org